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Death of a Witch

By the same author

The Twice-Born

This Island Now

co-authored with Dr R. L. Kapur

The Great Universe of Kota

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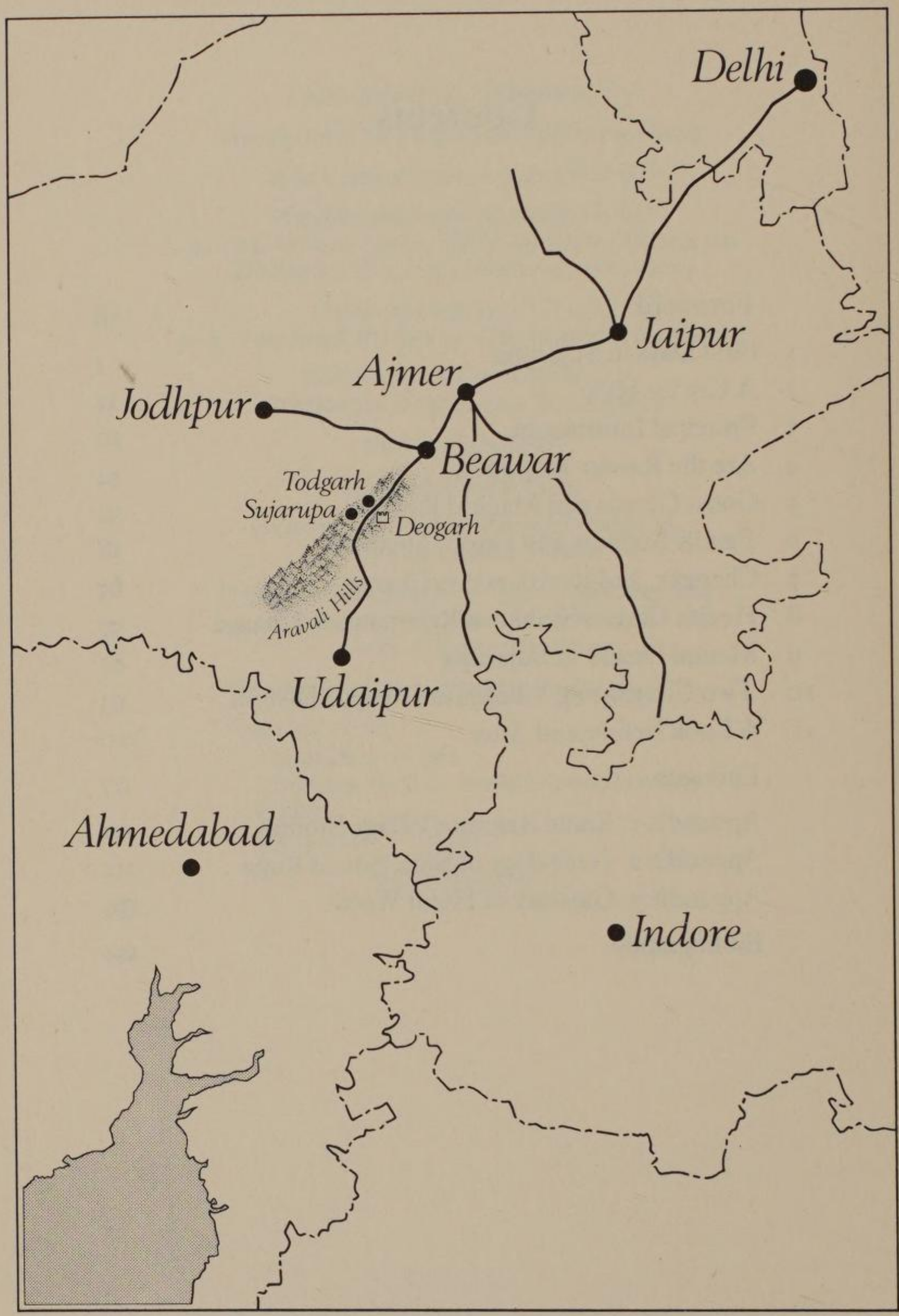
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Foreword

It is not uncommon for delays to occur between an anthropologist's fieldwork and its eventual publication in book form: but a lag of thirty-three years is surely one of the longest, and calls for a word of explanation. To put it briefly, I became personally involved in the village in which I had my first field experience and sought opportunities to visit it again over the years. While doing so I became increasingly interested in the villagers' preoccupation with supernatural causes of illness; but it was only gradually that I learned about the prevalence of witches and their death-dealing powers. Illnesses caused by witches were feared even more than those ascribed to gods, demons and male and female ghosts. Among my informants there were a number of priestly shamans, exorcists and spiritual healers. Not all of these claimed to possess strong enough magic to be able to overcome a witch, but there were some among them to whom the villagers turned for help in complete confidence that they could defeat any witch's evil power. This trust remained unshaken even when, as sometimes happened, the victim died before the healer's saving magic had time to do its work.

My first observations in the village of Sujarupa, in the Udaipur District of Rajasthan, north India, were carried out between January and June, 1950. They have remained unpublished for two reasons: the first being that they formed part of a larger series of studies carried out by a team of workers from Columbia, New York, led by Gitel Steed. Our findings were to be published collectively. Unfortunately, some years went by, Gitel suffered from a prolonged and ultimately fatal illness and the collective undertaking was never completed. The second reason (at least for my part) was a growing doubt of the validity of our personality tests when they were used in societies which were markedly different from those in which the tests had been developed.

A major task of the project was to administer a series of psychological tests to our village informants, while at the same time we were to collect data about the characteristics of their respective micro-societies. The principal personality tests which we used were the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) and the Rorschach, or inkblot, test. We believed that both of these tests were

relatively culture-free, but in this we were wrong. Both tests proved to be so unlike anything in our village subjects' previous experience that their responses could not validly be compared with those of subjects in the Western countries.

The TAT consists of a series of pictures, each showing one or two men, women or children in ambiguous but vaguely dramatic situations. When asked to tell the story shown in each of the pictures, Western subjects will usually identify with one of the figures in the pictures and tell a story based upon their own fantasies or their life experiences. The TAT cards which we employed had been altered to make the figures appear to be Indian; but we had not taken into account the Indians' preoccupation with caste, costume and mode of livelihood. Their response would often take the form of: 'What is this Muslim doing among those Jain merchants?' or 'I don't know what caste these people belong to.' Unless they could define the characters' social roles, they had great difficulty in making up a story about them. If their halting responses were interpreted according to Western criteria, they would be judged to be of limited intelligence and profoundly inhibited – but I knew that in other, more familiar settings they were neither.

The same difficulty arose with the Rorschach Test in which the subject was shown a succession of curious shapes, in black and white or in colours. These are roughly symmetrical on either side of a vertical axis, resembling the shapes which are formed if a splash of ink has dropped on a sheet of paper which has then been folded over. In this test the respondents are asked to describe what they can see in the intricate confusion of shapes – just as people sometimes visualize living forms in the movement of flames in a log fire. Here again the task was totally unfamiliar and the responses were laconic. Many of my subjects would turn the cards (which were mounted on stiff glossy squares of white cardboard) over and over and various ways round before they ventured to identify animals, human beings or anything else. In the West, only mentally disordered respondents do this – but our village subjects were not crazy, just bewildered by the novelty of the task, and of the materials.

In the social world of these villagers, it was unthinkable for a woman to be closeted alone with strange men – but these tests have to be administered to subjects without anyone else present and possibly prompting. Consequently, I could not in principle administer the tests to the women of the village; in practice, however, several of the older women were sufficiently curious to take the tests with me and my dialect-interpreter Prem Chand. Their responses would also be rated bizarre if they were interpreted according to the rules which have been developed in the West.

I had greater success with the Goodenough Draw a Man test, in which I offered a blank sheet of paper and a coloured pencil to children of various ages. Although paper of any kind was scarce and sheets of white paper a novelty, they set about the task of drawing a man with relish. The older children often went on to draw warriors and animals, following the crude

stylization of paintings which they had seen on the whitewashed walls of local temples.

All of this material, together with that of Gitel Steed and her other assistants, was conveyed to New York where typed copies were made and photographed on microfilm for future reference. I received, three years later, carbon copies of my village interviews and daily notes, which have been invaluable in my writing of this long-postponed book. They have been supplemented by my observations in subsequent years, particularly those made in 1980 and 1981.

During my six months in Sujarupa in the first half of 1950, Gitel Steed and I each paid a short visit to each other's village during which we compared notes on the progress of our work. Gitel worked with male and female interpreters. As a woman, she was able to learn a great deal about the lives of the upper-caste women who lived in strict seclusion, and also about the experiences of women of the lower castes who were not so confined. I was grateful to Gitel for many helpful suggestions about our fieldwork.

In July, 1950, I returned to Cambridge University to take up a Rockefeller research fellowship which would enable me to return to India in order to carry out a study of cultural factors in the personality development of high-caste Hindus. After spending the autumn in Cambridge my new wife and I travelled by sea to Bombay, and then by train to Udaipur. There we set about selecting the village in which we would live throughout 1951.

I looked forward to revisiting Sujarupa, where I had made several good friends, notably Devi Singh, Ham Singh, Hira Singh and Prem Chand: but I had no inkling that I was to revisit the village frequently over the next thirty-one years (ten short visits between 1951 and 1981, and two or three weeks each in 1980 and 1981 in order to collect some systematic information). This prolonged contact had its origins in two events, one very agreeable and the other horrific.

News of the latter event was brought to me in Udaipur almost immediately after my arrival. An unsigned telegram from Sujarupa told me that a woman of the village, called Dhapu, had been killed and that three men and a woman were in jail awaiting trial. This was confirmed in a letter from Prem Chand, the local schoolmaster, which arrived on the same day. Both the letter and the telegram appealed to me to come to their aid.

I knew that the Dhapu in question must be the mother of Hira Singh (one of my best informants, as Dhapu had been too). It was only at the end of my stay in Sujarupa that I had learned that she was believed to be a witch and was held responsible for the deaths of several women and children. On at least two occasions in the past fifteen years she had been challenged, threatened and even beaten by anxious villagers who believed that she was 'eating the liver' of a member of their family: this time, however, she had been beaten to death. I was appalled to think of her violent and painful death, and I was also alarmed about the consequences of this event for the village as a whole, so I

travelled there next day by train and bicycle to see what I could do to help. (A full account of the episode and its consequences is given in Chapter 2.)

The agreeable event to which I have referred took place on the eve of my departure from Sujarupa, when I was adopted as a *Dharm-bhai* or honorific brother by two young married women. These were Dakhu, the twenty-year-old-wife of Devi Singh and another Dakhu, aged about sixteen, whose marriage to Ajab Singh of Togi village I had witnessed some two months earlier. Each girl tied a coloured thread round my wrist and I symbolically sealed the bargain by presenting a silver rupee to each of them, accepting them as my *Dharm-bahinen* or honorific sisters.

Personal friendships between men and women in Rajasthan are seldom encountered except in legend and song or, in everyday life, between a woman and her brothers or male cousins, who are safely tabooed from any sexual relationship. Marriages are arranged, and usually the young couple are complete strangers to each other when they begin their life together; it may take years before they settle into a truly companionable relationship – and some never do. The custom of adopting a Dharm-bhai makes it possible for a woman to claim a protective bond with someone other than her close kin. It is said to have developed during the long years of warfare between the Rajputs and the Moghuls, when a woman's husband would often be called away to battle, leaving her unprotected. At first this relationship remains purely formal, but if it persists over a span of years it becomes more securely based and gives the 'sister' an assurance that if she ever finds herself in serious difficulties in her life she can turn to her 'brother' for help.

For me, it enhanced the pleasure of each return visit to the villages of Sujarupa or Togi, to be met by a 'sister' bearing a brass tray on which were a garland, a sweetmeat to pop into my mouth, and a red paste with which she would place a *tilak*, or mark of welcome, on my brow. It would then be my turn to hand over the gifts (always including a new coloured cotton shawl) expected from a Dharm-bhai. They would insist on preparing my meals, using the rice, vegetables and fruit which I brought to share with their families. Conversation was never so fluent and easy with either 'sister' as it was with Devi Singh and other men of the village, but as the years went by I came to recognize that my 'sisters' set store by our relationship no less than I did.

Their lives were not easy. Ajab Singh became an alcoholic, neglecting his fields and his family. He died in 1977, still in his forties, having at least fulfilled his responsibilities by completing the marriage of his two daughters and the engagement of his ten-year-old son Ratan Singh whose wedding took place two years later. When Nancy and I visited Togi in 1979 we found that Ratan Singh's schooling had been interrupted since his father's death because his mother could not afford the expenses involved. We then undertook to meet the expenses of his schooling and he eagerly resumed his studies, although he found himself two years behind his former classmates.

Devi Singh's wife had two sons and three daughters, all of whom except the younger son, Taru Singh, were married by 1981. She became accepted as one of the senior wives in Sujarupa, and at the same time, as the years advanced, I noticed that in the privacy of their own house she and Devi Singh began to converse with each other in a more relaxed and mutually considerate way than any other village couple I knew. Unhappily, their companionable marriage was not destined to last much longer.

I found myself involved in another personal tragedy in 1981, at the end of this span of thirty-one years. During our visit to Sujarupa in March of that year I learned that Devi Singh's wife had been ill for several months. When I examined her, I was dismayed to find evidence of a cancer of the stomach, with secondary growths. I urged her and Devi Singh to let me drive her to a hospital in Ajmer, just over eighty miles away, but they both adamantly refused. Dakhu told me that a local Government doctor had given her the same advice two months earlier, but nothing would persuade her to enter a hospital. I did not press her because I considered her condition to be already inoperable. Instead, I took her and most of her family on two trips in my car, one to the city of Udaipur, which she had never seen, and the other to a celebrated temple of Lord Shiva some thirty miles distant, which she had always wanted to visit. She greatly enjoyed these family excursions, although they left her exhausted.

Just before my return to Delhi, on 26 March, she alarmed us all by feeling nauseated and then vomiting blood; but by late afternoon she felt better and insisted on sitting up in bed in order to garland me before I set out. On 31 March I received a laconic unsigned telegram from Sujarupa: DAKHUBAI WELL DON'T WORRY; but only seven days later came another: DAKHUBAI EXPIRED DEVI SINGH

My last visit to Sujarupa, in mid-June, 1981, was one of condolence. Nancy and I drove from Delhi in two stages, setting out each day at 4.30 a.m. and halting soon after ten o'clock to shelter from the heat of the sun – at this time the midday temperature in Rajasthan was reaching 120 degrees in the shade.

It was not a comfortable journey, but it meant the fulfilment of a double obligation: to Dakhu as my sister and to the stricken Devi Singh as my good friend. The other villagers also seemed gratified that Nancy and I had wished to share their grief over Dakhu's death before we returned to England, but it was Devi Singh's gruff emotion that made the journey worthwhile.

Now, thirty-two years since I first set foot in Sujarupa, I have been given the opportunity to devote twelve months to reviewing the daily notes of my fieldwork in 1950, together with additional observations up to 1981. In this book I have endeavoured to describe Sujarupa and its citizens as I first knew them, the ways in which they have changed and some respects in which they have – not always to their advantage – resisted change.

I am profoundly grateful to the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars for the fellowship which has enabled me to undertake this task in the

uniquely helpful environment of the Center, and in the stimulating company of its staff and its multinational community of scholars. My long overdue thanks are also offered to all the Indian officials, the amiable strangers, the Scottish missionaries and, above all, the friends in Sujarupa who have helped me over these many years. In particular, I am glad to acknowledge the assistance which I received from Christian Medical College, Vellore, when I first stocked up my medicine chest in 1950, and from the Post-Graduate Institute for Medical Education and Research, Chandigarh, when I stocked up again (with a very different array of medications) some thirty years later. Without their help I should not have been able to demonstrate – however imperfectly – the prompt relief which modern medicine can bring to many of the common diseases of Indian villagers. My most profound thanks are due to the citizens of Sujarupa, not forgetting those who have died since 1950, for their willingness to help me, sustained over the years. My particular thanks go to Sri Devi Singh and Sri Prem Chand who have offered me their hospitality and their welcome in Sujarupa and in Togi over so many years.

My grateful thanks are also due to the Leverhulme Trust for their award of a fellowship to meet the expenses of the later stages of this project and making possible the inclusion of photographs taken in Sujarupa on various occasions between 1950 and 1981.

I am especially grateful to my wife, Nancy K. Shields, for the photographs dated 1979, 1980 and 1981, and to Mary Holland for her constructively critical reading of the final draft of this book.

G. M. Carstairs

Washington, DC, 1981–82,
and London, NW3, 1982–83

Note: Because some names such as Moti Singh, Nathu Singh and Hira Singh are shared by more than one person in Sujarupa, I have at times adopted the local custom of linking a man's given name with that of his father. In this way Moti/Surat can be distinguished from Moti/Hama, Nathu/Asa from Nathu/Dalla and Hira/Pancha from Hira/Lum. In addressing them personally, however, one would always use the given name and the honorific 'Singh'.

I

First Days in Sujarupa

The quest for what I came to regard as a special village began in New York. During the first six months of 1949 I lived in that city learning about disturbed children and disturbed families at the Child Development Center. My teachers included Marianne Kris, Nathan Ackerman and Peter Neubauer – and the children whom we tried to help. It was not easy. I remember flinching when I took a bath one evening, and counting sixteen bites, scratches or bruises on my body – the legacy of certain children's outbursts of rage. But this too was educational: I learned how to envelop a child in a tantrum in a hug against which he would struggle while I carried him away from the scene of battle. When we were alone, in a quiet place, the little demon would relax, snuggle in my arms and ask me to read him a story. Interviews with the parents also sometimes released storms of emotion. In exploring the origins of their distress I was introduced to a culture which until then I had known only through contemporary literature: the culture of New York Jewish family life.

At the same time I followed Margaret Mead's evening seminars, at Columbia University, on the influence of culture on personality development, and I was privileged to join the sessions of the group of colleagues who had been engaged with her and Ruth Benedict in 'studying cultures at a distance' during and immediately after the Second World War.

I used these experiences to prepare myself for a future field study of cultural influences on personality development, which would be undisguisedly 'in the steps of Margaret Mead'. The fieldwork for this study was carried out in 1951-52, and it was published in 1957 under the title *The Twice-Born*. Meanwhile, in the summer of 1949, I accepted an invitation from the anthropologist Gitel Steed to join her in a period of fieldwork in rural India under the auspices of Columbia University. Our task was quite specific, namely, to administer a number of tests of intelligence and personality (hopefully, culture-free) to children and adults in a variety of Indian village communities. Gitel Steed elected to carry out her first fieldwork in Gujarat, and I undertook to do mine with Rajput villagers in one of the former Princely States of Rajasthan.

This choice was prompted by the fact that my early childhood had been spent in a Mission Bungalow in Nasirabad, a small town fourteen miles from Ajmer, in the heart of Rajasthan. During the first nine years of my life I had spoken Hindustani at least as well as English and I hoped that I could soon recapture a certain fluency in this language, the *lingua franca* of northern India – as indeed proved to be the case.

We reached Bombay in late October, 1949, and spent six weeks working with Indian colleagues on adapting our test materials for use in India.

In December 1949, Gitel and I travelled together to Ahmedabad from which city she would continue by bus or car to her village, while I caught another train to Ajmer, a former Moghul seat of government surrounded by the major Rajput principalities: Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur. Once there I sought advice from the Chief Commissioner for Ajmer-Merwara (a former British territory), from a number of Indian veterans of service in the railways, in local schools and in rural health clinics and also from the Rev. Jack Drummond, one of the dwindling group of missionaries of the Church of Scotland of which my father had been a member from 1904 to 1934.

The Chief Commissioner showed me a large-scale map of Rajasthan and advised me to seek my village in the valleys of the Aravali hill range running north to south through Jaipur, Ajmer, and parts of the states of Udaipur and Jodhpur: among these people, he explained, old ways and beliefs change more slowly than in the villages of the plains. I still thought it worthwhile to explore the possibilities in Jodhpur, one of the historic warrior-states; but on a visit there I was dissuaded by the Chief of Police who explained that their villages were currently suffering from a drought which was so severe that many of the able-bodied villagers had temporarily abandoned their homes, driving their cattle, sheep and goats for long distances in search of fodder.

His reluctance to commend a Jodhpur village for my work may have also been due to the fact that the local famine was causing many Rajputs to resort to banditry, raiding and looting villages where they believed that shopkeepers had hoarded grain. Our interview was interrupted by a phone call informing him about a small engagement that morning, in which two of his armed police had been killed, on the road from Ajmer along which I had driven only the previous day. Like the Ajmer Commissioner he advised me to seek a village among the Aravali hills, on the additional grounds that there the drought had been less severe.

In Jodhpur I also met another missionary, the Rev. Hugh Baikie, who was on the point of making a journey to Todgarh, a village in the Aravali hills. I was glad to accept his invitation to travel with him. We reached Todgarh by country bus a few days later and were lodged in an empty bungalow maintained by the mission for occasional visitors. Here I met an elderly Indian Christian, Pastor Devi Lal, who had an intimate knowledge of the surrounding country. We pored over maps, singling out a number of villages which might meet my requirements. Most of these were in Udaipur State,

whose border is only four miles south of Todgarh.

My next task was to hire a bicycle and explore these villages, which varied in size from over a thousand to less than one hundred inhabitants. To my relief I found that all the men I met could speak Hindustani, although among themselves they used a local dialect of Hindi. In most villages members of one caste predominated, but one or two households of other castes were also found. I preferred to work in a one-caste village of Rajput farmers (since this would improve the homogeneity of my test respondents) while at the same time learning as much as possible from members of the numerous other castes with whom Rajputs necessarily interact in their daily living.

On the second day of these exploratory forays I was hailed by a man from a small hamlet, not far from the narrow metalled road. I paused to converse with a group of men and children who soon gathered round, and explained that I was planning to live for some months in a village of this region in order to study the language, life and customs of Rajputs.

Were they Rajputs? 'Yes, indeed,' they replied: 'Rawat Rajputs.' They told me that in common with Rajputs and Sikhs the names of all male Rawats carry the title Singh, which means Lion.

A powerfully built, forceful and cheerful young man, whom I soon came to know as Devi Singh, said: 'Come and stay with us, you will like it here and we will help you in your work.' The others chorused their approval. I asked Devi Singh a few questions, and learned that this was not a village (*gaon*) but a hamlet (*baria*), an offshoot of a large village called Lakhaguda, which I had already visited. It is called Sujarupa ka Baria after its founder Suja, son of Rupa. In 1950 it consisted of twenty-five households of Rawat Rajputs, and one other, at a little distance from the others, which was inhabited by a family of Regars or leatherworkers who are regarded as untouchable by most high-caste Hindus. Only some two hundred yards separate the outer limits of Sujarupa from those of another, larger hamlet called Hamaton ki Guar, in which Rawat Rajputs predominate although there are also groups of houses occupied by small numbers of Regars, Kumbars (potters), Jogis (holy beggars, but also cultivators) and one family of Lohars (blacksmiths). In Lakhaguda, a mile further along the road, there are families of Brahmins and of Banias (merchants) and also two of Dholis (drummers) and one of Raos, the archivists of the Rawat community who keep records of their births, marriages and deaths and of the purchase or sale of land.

I decided that this was a promising base from which to operate, so I told Devi Singh and his fellow-villagers that I would return next day with two tents, my cook named Amar Singh and our belongings. I also let them know that I was a doctor and that I should be pleased to see any sick people and to treat them without charge as long as my small store of medicines lasted.

Next day (14 January, 1950) I rode the seven miles from Todgarh to Sujarupa on a rather bad-tempered camel, appropriately named Ziddi Singh (Mr Stubborn), which was also laden with our tents and luggage. We were

shown a piece of level ground at the roadside, shaded by one or two trees, about 150 yards from the main entrance to the hamlet. A crowd of children, together with one or two adults, helped us to pitch our two tents and showed a lively interest in my sparse belongings which included, in addition to my medicine chest, a camp bed and bedroll, a folding chair and a copy of Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* – whether to provoke or to allay homesickness, I am not sure.

While Amar Singh set about preparing our first meal, I explored the layout of Sujarupa. It consisted of a cluster of cottages with walls of stone covered inside and out with a pale beige plaster of mud and cowdung; a similar, frequently renewed, plaster covered the floor. Each house had a pitched roof of wood poles which supported a covering of dull red fire-baked tiles. Two houses flanked the dusty path leading up from the roadside, one of these belonging to Deva Regar, the other recently built by a Rawat named Bhur Singh. The rest of the houses were clustered in an irregular circle on top of a small hill. Each house had its own yard in which there were pens for a few goats, cattle and buffaloes, and these were surrounded by seven-foot-high boundary fences consisting of heaps of dry branches of thorn trees. The outer perimeter of these fences encircled the whole village, which could be entered only through a single doorway, whose massive wooden door was studded with outsize iron nail-heads. The door gave access to a communal building, the village *paul* or guest-house. On either side of the entrance there were raised, mud-plastered platforms on which visitors could sleep. The lane which traversed the *paul* was busy all day with the coming and going of villagers working in the fields, of women going to the well to draw water, and of livestock.

Quite soon I was to learn that the thorn fences were a necessary protection against jackals, hyenas, wolves and panthers: every night we could hear the howling of jackals, and during the hot weather, when I slept under the stars, more than once I saw at first light wolves or hyenas on the hillside just beyond our protective enclosure. The heavy doorway was a reminder that, only a generation or two earlier, minor warfare between villages and bandit raids were frequent.

It is, I suppose, a very general experience that one's perceptions of a new environment are most acute during the first few days. I was reminded of this alertness to new impressions when I read the notes which I wrote on wakening in my tent on 15 January, my first morning in the village. The entry runs: 'The day begins at 5.30 a.m. with two oxcarts passing on the road, bells ringing at oxen's necks. Soon after come the sounds of herds of sheep and goats being driven from Sujarupa past the tent, to the hillside. As yet, sounds from the villages are occasional, and few. Sun comes suddenly at 7 o'clock. Birds begin to sing, all at once and the villagers begin to be astir, with children's voices, men calling messages. The first well is heard at 7.30; the nearest one (*Phulwala kua* – the well of flowers) began work at 8.15. Bhur

Singh, Ram Lal and Nathu Singh have come to my tent to talk and "to help me learn things".'

More than thirty years later, I am surprised that there is no mention of the pair of wild peacocks which roosted near the top of a tree, close by – because even now I can remember the heavy beat of their wings and their strident cries, at dawn and at sunset. Perhaps our sudden arrival into their territory had driven them away, that first night, but if so they were soon back again. (Peacocks are venerated here, being regarded as sacred.)

During the next few days I further explored both Sujarupa and its larger neighbour, Hamaton ki Guar. My daily notes show me that within the first ten days I encountered a number of themes which were to be of lasting importance in my attempt to understand the way of life, the beliefs and values, and at least some attributes of the personalities of the Rawat Rajputs. (In retrospect, however, I realized that several of my most eager informants had described both Sujarupa and their own role in its community in rather idealized terms; as happens in a series of psychotherapy sessions, a more candid – and less flattering – account could only be communicated later on, when we knew each other better.)

In those first days, new experiences came thick and fast. In the course of an early walk with my three volunteer guides I was already puzzled as to the true caste status of my village hosts. One of the men we met in Hamaton was introduced to me as Bheru Singh, but he insisted on amending this to Bheru Singh Chauhan, and described himself as a Chauhan Rajput. In the course of the same walk, when we met a group of Rawat youngsters Nathu Singh introduced one or two by name: Lallu Singh and Dungar Singh, then said: 'All these are Chauhan – but this one is a Lohar,' pushing a smiling boy to one side as he spoke.

I made a note at the time: 'Chauhan Rajputs and Rawat Rajputs: must find the distinction.' I did not realize that I should still be working on this question thirty-one years later.

Not long afterwards I asked another villager his caste, and he replied: 'Rajput'. When I further asked of which clan, he became confused and said: 'Potter Rajput', which is a contradiction in terms. Members of his very humble caste were apparently also eager to claim to belong to the high-status warrior community.

One fact of life in this area was soon brought to my attention, namely, the harmful effects – on people, livestock and crops – of failures of the monsoon rains. The oldest inhabitants were survivors of a particularly severe famine in 1900–1901 in which there were many deaths among infants and the elderly. (The census of 1901 showed that, instead of its usual slow growth, the population of Ajmer-Merwara had declined by 17 per cent from its 1891 level.) Every adult could remember lean years, so it was perhaps not surprising that when I asked villagers, later in my stay, their idea of happiness a common response was: 'To eat two meals every day.'

There was considerable disquiet about the prospect for the spring and autumn harvests of 1950 because the rains had been scanty during the previous year, and some of the wells were drying up already so that the ripening crops could not be irrigated. Anxieties were centred upon the next monsoon: if it failed, only famine relief works, with payment in grain provided by the Government, would pull them through. Much discussion took place about how severe the drought might become before the year was out.

I should not, however, give the impression that they were constantly preoccupied with the fear of famine. The men and the children with whom I spent most of my time were cheerful, friendly – and very curious as to what I was really doing here. Amar Singh, himself a Rawat from a village in Jodhpur State, was frequently quizzed about our real intentions. He kept me informed about the rumours which flew about: that I must be a spy from Pakistan, or perhaps from America; or that I was a secret agent of the new Government sent to see whether they were hoarding grain. Even more alarming stories circulated among the women, whose modified purdah required them to veil their faces and communicate with me only through a male intermediary. Some three months later, when they had become used to my presence, they told me with much laughter that they were at first afraid that I would rape them and steal their jewellery.

I was indebted to Nol Singh, a veteran of seven years' service in the Indian Army (including a tour of duty in Iraq during the Second World War) for hitting upon a truly plausible explanation of my presence: 'This man is an officer who has been sent on a course. His work is to learn our language and our history. When he has done this, he will be given a rise of pay.' This seemed generally acceptable, although for many weeks newcomers to the village continued to offer more dramatic alternatives, such as: 'There are hundreds of men like this, in villages all over India, taking notes: nobody knows who has sent them, or why they are here.'

Nathu Singh was the first to invite me to cross the threshold of his house-yard, where he showed me his livestock pens, but not the interior of the small single-roomed house which served him and his wife as living-room, bedroom and kitchen. Next day Devi Singh showed me his yard, and the interior of the rooms used by his own family – separate rooms for his mother, his brother Gomin Singh's family, and his own. Their rooms contained some bedding, hung on a clothes line, one or two tin trunks, a few cooking utensils and one or two earthenware pots filled with water drawn from their well. The floors were bare but clean, as though recently swept.

On 17 January Moti/Surat told me that there had been a death in the village. Bheru Singh's wife had died before daybreak, and had been cremated in the early dawn. He went on to tell me about some of the rituals associated with death. When the end seems to be approaching, the sick person is laid on the ground, to be in contact with mother earth, and relatives gather round to give him or her their loving support. After death the body is washed and

covered with a white cloth, then placed on a litter for the journey to the burning-ghat. Only men attend the actual cremation. Having done so, they go to the well and bathe, in order to cleanse themselves and their clothing from the pollution of death. Moti Singh said they had considered inviting me to accompany them to the ghat but did not do so because I should have been inconvenienced by having to bathe in the cold of early morning. Instead, he led me to the afflicted house, to join a number of men who were sitting outside its porch as a token of sympathy with the family: from inside the women of the house and their sympathizers wailed in chorus, from time to time, while the men passed a short clay pipe from hand to hand, and exchanged gossip.

On my third night in the tent Devi Singh and four or five other young men came to visit me, bearing a battered old sitar, a pair of hand drums (*tabla*) and several pairs of small brass cymbals (*majera*). They were followed by a retinue of small boys and girls, so that the tent was full to overflowing when my visitors began to sing a series of *bhajans* or devotional hymns to Ishwar, the ultimate deity. Since these were sung in the local dialect of *magrai* I could not follow the words but I enjoyed the lively musical accompaniment and the zest with which everyone joined in the choruses. In the intervals between the bhajans one or other of the men would call out: 'Bolo, Sath Guru Dev ki jai ho!' (Praise to God the True Teacher) and everyone would echo his call. The singing, which went on for over an hour, was cheerful and informal, but at the same time an act of piety. Several of the men performed well with both the sitar and the tablas, but Devi Singh displayed a special fervour in both his playing and his singing.

This was my first introduction to bhajan-singing as a pious entertainment. It was followed on the night of 20 January by a formal *satsang*, or session for devotional singing and religious teaching, held in the village *paul;* but before the satsang began I had an interesting medical consultation.

In the early afternoon of 20 January, I was asked by Devi Singh's elder brother Gomin Singh to come to his house, to do something for his wife who had become possessed by a devil. I was keenly aware that my medical training in Edinburgh had been woefully inadequate in the areas of devil possession and exorcism but I clutched my stethoscope like a talisman and followed him to his house where his seventeen-year-old wife lay rolling on the floor, wailing lustily. When she was told that I wished to examine her physically she cried more loudly than ever, until she was rudely ordered to make less noise. To my relief I found that I could diagnose her condition: she was in the second stage of labour with her baby's head in the correct position. I was even able to use my talisman and check that the foetal heart was beating strongly and not too fast. I told Gomin Singh that this was a very healthy little devil whom he would soon see face to face. (In fact, he would not do so, because Rawat custom demands that a father must not see his child's face until six days after its birth when the naming ceremony is performed.)

Later that same afternoon Gomin Singh came to my tent beaming and

bearing a brass tray with some wheat from his own fields as a gift. His first child had been born, and was a boy. I did not realize at the time how lucky I had been: because I had predicted a safe birth – and of a boy, no less – I was given credit for what happened. My medical practice had got off to a good start. If it had been a difficult or dangerous labour, my future relations with the inhabitants of Sujarupa would have suffered, perhaps irreparably.

Soon after receiving this good news I joined the group of villagers and guests who were assembling at the *paul* for the satsang. Clearly, this was going to be a more formal session of hymn-singing than I had yet seen (or would in fact ever see again). The entire floor of the *paul* had been freshly plastered, and was carpeted for the occasion with cotton-filled quilts and woven rugs. The two principal guests of honour, conspicuous in gleaming white loincloths and shirts sat crosslegged on the floor, near the harmonium, sitar and tabla players. The senior of these two was a Guru who lives on the slopes of Goram Ghat, a peak in the Aravali hill range, some three miles away; the other was Genji Singh, a Guru from Todgarh. Special food had been prepared in Ham Singh's and Devi Singh's houses and was offered to the guests as they arrived. All this took time, so it was after nine o'clock before the satsang got properly under way. Each bhajan began with a slow invocation and then changed to a brisk syncopated rhythm, the singer's verses being echoed in chorus by the whole assembly.

Fortunately, the senior Guru was pleased at my curiosity about everything that happened, and took pains to explain the gist of each of the bhajans to me in simple Hindustani. He also pronounced short sermons after some of the hymns, drawing out their moral. Several of them, he explained, were composed by Kabir (1440-1518) whose hymns were admired by Akbar the Great, half a century after the poet's death. Kabir, like Akbar, envisaged an eventual union between all the religions, starting with Hinduism and Islam. As the night advanced, both the tempo and the fervour of the singing were heightened. Several times, one or other of the worshippers became carried away, rose to his feet and performed a turning and twisting dance in the confined space where he stood, until the bhajan finished. The hymns were prefaced by shouts of 'Sath Guru Dev ki Jai' (Victory to God, the Teacher of Truth) or 'Aj ke anand ki jai' (Praise to this night's happiness). When newcomers joined the group they clasped the feet of each Guru in turn, then saluted the audience collectively and said 'Jai Guru Maharaj', which was echoed by all the company. This, I was told, is a greeting to Bhagwan, the great God above all, in whose honour the satsang was being held.

Towards midnight, the fervour reached a climax, when we all stood and the Guru performed *arti*, the offering of flame. He carried an oil-wick light on a brass tray, and waved this in front of each participant, who passed his hands over the flame and then clasped them in a salute to Bhagwan.

Once this was finished some of the participants took their leave from the Gurus and set out to walk home, but at least fifty out of the crowd of over a

hundred settled down to sing more bhajans until daylight. I realized at the time that this was a rather special hymn-singing, but it was only some weeks later that I learned that it was held in memory of a Guru called Maharamji who lived near the town of Beawar but had disciples all over this countryside. More specifically, it was a celebration of his *samadhi*, or self-immolation.

Some five months ago this Guru announced to his followers that he would depart from this life at a specified date and hour in October 1949. The news spread quickly, and so great a gathering of devotees assembled in his village that the local Government officer (the 'little Sahib') authorized the issue of grain to feed four thousand. For three days and nights there was a continual singing of bhajans, while the Guru sat in deep meditation, and then at the appointed hour he was reverently lowered – still sitting crosslegged and apparently oblivious of his surroundings – in a pit, and buried.

When I heard this, I exclaimed: 'Do you mean he was buried alive?' But Deva Regar, who had been his disciple for twelve years, corrected me: at the predicted hour, he did not die, he took samadhi, which means that he had so far advanced in holiness that he was enabled to take leave not only of this incarnation, but of the entire chain of rebirth. His spirit had merged with that of Parmatma, the divine spirit: he had attained the highest goal of Hindu spiritual endeavour.

In this satsang, as in other, less formal ones, I had been impressed by the spirit of brotherhood which prevailed among the participants. Many of the bhajans – especially those of Kabir – stressed that all mankind is one family, the children of God, and that members of all castes and communities have equal access to God's grace. There were indeed representatives of several castes at this satsang, including some Regars (leatherworkers, of very low social status). I heard one of these singing a bhajan about the equality of all worshippers of God, but I could not fail to notice that he was seated at a lower level than the platform of the *paul* where all the rest were seated. In this form of worship, human rights are respected in principle, but not yet in practice except for those, like Maharamji, who have renounced the ties of ordinary life and have become *sannyasis* (saffron-clad holy beggars).

In a typical session of bhajan-singing the participants find themselves lifted out of the normal rut of everyday activities. The rhythmical music and the ecstatic quality of the hymns combine to make them feel elevated in spirit, nearer to Bhagwan: in the fervour of the occasion one could be filled with love and loyalty to this divine spirit, and feel close to Him; but Bhagwan does not make his presence manifest as do many of the lesser gods who are worshipped in Sujarupa and throughout Merwara. These deities have in common their willingness to respond to fervent prayers and worship by entering into the body of the priest (or shaman) who officiates at their shrine. For a time the priest remains in a state of trance, his whole body quivering while he gasps for breath. During the possession, he speaks in a different tone of voice. It is believed that this is the god, speaking through his body. Naturally, the god

speaks in the local dialect and this makes him readily approachable when villagers wish to seek his help.

One such shrine stood on a knoll between Sujarupa and Hamaton. This was referred to as the shrine of Devji. It contained a number of effigies of cobras: the chief object of worship here being Kagala Nag Devji, the divine snake. It was to this shrine that people were brought if they were bitten by a snake or by a rabid dog. There were three priests (*Bhopas*) of the shrine, named Dola, Azari and Kesa – all of the potter caste in Hamaton ki Guar. They had the attribute of becoming possessed by the spirit of Devji, and when so possessed they would suck out the poison from dog- or snake-bites. They also officiated at ceremonies of worship which took place at the shrine every Sunday evening and on a few specially auspicious days in the Hindu religious calendar.

24 January, 1950, proved to be one of these days. After sunset I sat with a number of the older men of both villages on the steps of the stone shrine. I recognized potters, Jogis and leatherworkers as well as Rawats in the gathering crowd. Inside the shrine, the three Bhopas were engaged in making offerings to the gods. One of them – Azari Kumbar – came round giving us each a few fragments of chopped leaves of the Bil tree to chew. A man sitting next to me explained that, when people join in this symbolic eating together, it unites them in a worshipful mood. If they have come seeking particular guidance or help from Devji, they will now fast until the next morning.

Kesa and Dola started the formal worship by chanting in turn some sacred verses concerning the god. Soon they start to sing a long hymn, with lingering pauses. Now many of the audience, including groups of women sitting in the outer darkness, join in the singing which is punctuated at times by invocations not only of Devji but also of Mahadev (or Shiva) and Ganga-mata (the sacred Ganges, worshipped as a mother-goddess). All this takes time. I notice that several small boys have become drowsy and have stretched out to sleep, each wrapped in a cotton cloth. A smaller one huddles against my side to keep warm, and dozes off. Now Kesa Bhopa takes over, uttering declamatory verses, to which the crowd (or some of them) respond in chorus. From the darkness, women's voices take up a quite different, nasal song which conflicts with the Bhopa's antiphony. In the light of a fire in front of the shrine I see a row of wrinkled elders, very erect and dignified, and beside them a cluster of young teenagers gazing quietly at the firelight as if happy to be taking part in this grown-up occasion. A little way off, the women have lit another fire and have gathered round it to keep warm. In the dark night, a flickering light tells us that a similar worship is taking place in Mandawar village, some two miles away.

Now a steady drumming accompanies Kesa Bhopa's chanting. Time passes slowly but after perhaps twenty minutes of chanting and drumming Azari Bhopa, who has been sitting near the fire, utters four sudden strangled shouts, so pained that I look to see whether he is having a fit. In fact, he has

gone into a trance. He is crouched upon his heels, rocking backwards and forwards, wheezing and grunting; his hands grope over his face, and in the air. More than once his rocking and groping work up to a high pitch, only to abate again, as if he cannot achieve the climax of full self-surrender. At this point, sounds of a conch-shell being blown, and of a rhythmical jingling of brass come from the shrine. The old Bhopa wrestles with the air, tears off his turban and his shirt, cries out and struggles to his feet. He stands, trembling and dancing on the spot for a moment, then runs inside the shrine where he is greeted with loud drumming. The conch blower and four men beating time with cymbals emerge and make a circuit of the shrine. As soon as they have done so, Azari Bhopa comes out, still grunting and gasping for breath, waving a brush of peacock feathers, their stems tied in a tight bundle. He shouts proclamations, some quite lengthy, retiring between each one into the shrine as if to recharge himself with divine energy. Each time an accelerated drumbeat heralds his reappearance. This happens fifteen times. Some of his pronouncements elicit responses from the crowd; on the fourteenth appearance, his message provokes a general chatter. After the fifteenth, people turn away: the show is over.

These have been public prophecies, about the next monsoon, the survival of cattle, the chances of a good harvest, but inside the shrine the Bhopa is squatting before the snake-image, still in trance. People crowd round him, asking about sicknesses of their family members or their cattle, and other domestic problems: through his grunts and gasps he utters reassurances, and also prescribes offerings which should be made to ensure that the gods are pleased. On the next day, in the afternoon, Kesa Bhopa became possessed, and relayed the messages of Devji to another audience of afflicted villagers.

The shrine of Devji was much patronized by our villagers but again and again I was told that the most powerful healing shrine was that of a god called Danaji, situated in the jungle a couple of miles beyond Todgarh. One moonlit evening, later in my stay, I set out walking with Mol Singh to consult the Bhopa of Danaji. Mol Singh's wife had preceded us, carrying their infant son Kim Singh. She was accompanied by several other women.

When Mol Singh and I neared the end of our nine-mile walk we could see two bonfires burning on a dark hillside. Their light showed us the small white shrine, and at a lower level the Bhopa, already in trance, responding to the requests of a series of supplicants. He was breathing stertorously, and quivering as if in a fever. His utterances usually took the form of grunts or sudden shouts, which his attendant interpreted into plain language. Mol Singh and I left our shoes among scores of others, at a proper distance from the consecrated ground, and joined a group who were waiting their turn. Now we could make out some of his sudden cries, such as 'Dekho!' (See!) or 'Samajh gio?' (Get it?)

Each supplicant squatted before him, and was patted on the head with a bundle of peacock feathers, then given a pinch of grain from a heap in front of

the Bhopa. Unless the grains were precisely five in number they were discarded and another pinch given. Then the Bhopa engaged in a short dialogue. When it was Mol Singh's turn, he presented his infant son Kim Singh, saying: 'We brought him here when he was sick, and you made him well, Maharaj.' The Bhopa toyed with some more grains of wheat, then told Mol Singh to keep bringing his child to the shrine from time to time, so that he would keep well, and ended with a brusque command: 'Chakkar maro' (Carry him once round the shrine).

Next, I was pushed forward, and after saluting him I received pinches of grain, first four and then five. Without waiting for me to make any request the Bhopa said: 'Good, now listen! Your people's rule – the English rule – will come back, will come back soon. You will get good employment, and good wages. Here take this!' (handing me a small, firm lime). 'When things go well with you, come back and honour Danaji.' The consultation finished as it had begun, with a tap on the head from the bundle of peacock's tailfeathers.

Mol Singh and I remained for about another hour, when the last supplicant was dealt with. Then an attendant brought the Bhopa a cup of water. Having drunk it, the Bhopa gave a final, very loud cry and sat motionless for some seconds, his finger pointing to the sky. Then he lowered his arm and became an ordinary mortal once again. His first act, however, was to greet all the assembled men and boys with a salutation of extreme humility, touching our feet, as a young man greets his elders.

We talked together, and he reminded me that we had met not many weeks earlier, when I had paid a visit to the Government Health Clinic in Todgarh. Now I remembered that I had indeed seen him, looking very ill indeed. He was suffering from acute lobar pneumonia, and I had prescribed a course of sulphonamides.

I said to him: 'Why then, Goma Singh, you and I do the same work, we try to help sick people.'

Goma Singh shook his head, and pointed upwards as he replied: 'It is God's work. We can only do it when it is his will. By ourselves, what can we do?'

I consider this remark to have been one of the most illuminating statements I heard during those months in Sujarupa. It touched upon the Indian belief that one can only be helped (either in sickness or in apprenticeship to a wise teacher) when one has complete faith in one's helper – and this is more likely to be achieved if he is the agent of a supernatural power.

As we walked back, Mol Singh told me that Goma Singh had, until only three years ago, been a seemingly hopeless alcoholic. As he stumbled home one night to his cottage near the dilapidated and long-disused shrine of Danaji, he fell in a drunken stupor and in a dream he saw Danaji himself – a terrifying mixture of God and demon – demanding that he stop drinking and become his Bhopa. On sobering up he dismissed the vision as a mere nightmare: but it happened again a second, and then a third time, so he knew

that the Danaji meant business when he threatened to kill him if he did not obey his command. This was a turning-point in Goma Singh's life: he stopped drinking completely, restored the neglected shrine and soon began to be visited with great force by its deity. Within three years his fame – or rather, that of the Danaji acting through him – had spread far and wide.

Mol Singh also informed me that supernatural powers, whether those of a ghost, a witch, a powerful charm or a god-shrine, reach a climax of strength during a span of twelve years, and then fall into decline.

To return to the events of my first ten days in Sujarupa, I should record that within a week several of the villagers urged me to be their guest, and to move my belongings into the *paul*, or guest chamber, where I should be less exposed to the winter winds than in my tent (and, incidentally, where my belongings would be less likely to be pilfered by passers-by). The *paul* was indeed more spacious and more comfortable, and it also offered me a vantage-point from which I could observe, and participate in, the daily life of the village. Its only disadvantage was its almost total lack of privacy – but that was a Western luxury largely alien to my hosts' own experience, and one which I learned to do without.

I was pleased, however, when, a few weeks later, Hira/Pancha offered me a room of my own for a modest rent. This was a separate stone-built room, about ten feet by six feet, which was large enough for my needs. Hira Singh's mother Dhapubai turned out the small herd of goats which had been penned there, and replastered its floor with the traditional mixture of mud and cowdung, and I moved in.

This became my home for the next four months, but I was not its only occupant. In mid-March, 1950, I was surprised to find that a small brown bird, rather like a wren, was building its nest in a recess in the wall, just above my bed. She completed the nest, went on to lay four eggs and set about hatching them. She was kept busy all day, flying in and out through a small hole in one wall in order to catch insects and bring them to her chicks. At night I usually read in bed for a while by the light of my pressure-gas lantern, and while I did so she would fly about in the limited space of our room, catching mosquitoes to feed her cheeping family. This was a mutually beneficial arrangement. I was sorry when, remarkably quickly, her chicks learned to fly and the whole family abandoned their nest.

The doorway of my new premises was just across the lane from the cottage occupied by Hira Singh's family (his wife and infant son and his mother, Dhapu). It was also only a few paces from the central *hathai* or sitting-place where all the adult men of Sujarupa were accustomed to assemble whenever decisions affecting the whole community had to be reached. Here, more than ever, I felt that I was at the heart of village life.

2

A Cry for Help

Having just mentioned the hathai, the symbol of village unity, cooperation and open discussion, it is now necessary to interrupt the sequence of events in order to describe a later event which, for several months, seriously threatened the peace and the cohesion of this community.

Within a few days of my arrival in Udaipur at the beginning of January 1951 to start a year's fieldwork in a much larger village, I received simultaneously a telegram from Sujarupa and a letter from the local schoolmaster, Prem Chand, both telling me that Dhapu, the mother of Hira Singh, had been beaten to death and that four members of the village were in jail. They begged me to come at once to their aid.

I realized what must have happened: Dhapu was believed to be a witch, responsible for the deaths of several mothers and young children. She had twice before been confronted and beaten in the hope of saving the lives of her supposed victims – but this time things had gone too far. I decided to catch the next day's train to Kambli Ghat, and to bicycle from there to Sujarupa to see what I could do to help.

My journey began next morning at Udaipur station with a very Indian contretemps. The station master said that my bicycle, newly brought out from England, could not accompany me – not even in the luggage van – because several forms must be filled out and the State Customs Officer's approval obtained before it could be lawfully allowed out of the city: and that officer was not available. I found myself getting angry about these obscure regulations but I remembered in time that this would get me nowhere. Instead, I told the station master about my village friends and their predicament, and appealed to him for help. This was immediately forthcoming, the insuperable obstacles were forgotten and the train started only a few minutes late. During its slow progress I had time to think about the many conversations I had had with Hira Singh, and with Dhapu. They were not only my nearest neighbours in the village, but also among my best informants. Hira Singh liked to talk about his experiences in the army during the Second World War in the countries which are now known as Iran, Iraq and Pakistan. He also proved to be better informed than most of his kinsmen about the legends associated

with the principal festivals of the Hindu religious calendar, such as Holi, Divali and Dassera. His mother appeared to be a woman of consequence in the village because other women often came to take tea at her house, as her guests.

I soon learned from other informants that Hira Singh owned more land than any other head of a family because in his line of descent from Suja Rupa, the founder of the village, there had been only one male child in three successive generations. As a result, Hira Singh had inherited – undivided – all the fields which his grandfather Dungar Singh had inherited from his own father, Suja Rupa. In contrast, the lands of each of Suja Rupa's five other sons had been divided and subdivided among their numerous male descendants. As a result, Hira Singh was now comparatively wealthy and much envied. During his absence on military service there was even a conspiracy to have his inheritance invalidated by the local District Court, some fifteen miles away; but this was foiled by Dhapu who got there first and ensured that her son's legacy was duly ratified.

My neighbours were therefore the targets of a good deal of hostility from some households in the village, especially those whose share of repeatedly subdivided plots of land was now quite small. Hira Singh was in fact a very courteous, mild-mannered man, but his mother was feared because she was quick-tempered, fierce and formidable when crossed. All this I learned during the first four months of my stay. I also learned that among the many supernatural agencies which could bring misfortune, sickness or death upon a family, the one most feared was the *dakan*, or witch.

Dhapubai clearly had a forceful personality. Although she was usually exaggeratedly polite towards me, there were occasions when I heard her voice raised in anger – and then she displayed a remarkable command of offensive sexual swearwords. Not surprisingly people were reluctant to cross her; but it was only towards the end of my stay in Sujarupa that I learned the real reason why she was feared: this was because for nearly twenty years she had been (and still was) believed to be a dakan – the only one in Sujarupa.

In this community deaths of small children are unhappily quite common occurrences, and deaths in childbirth are not rare. These deaths are almost always attributed to the work of a witch. It is believed that there is at least one witch in every large village, and sometimes more.

The account of witches' behaviour given in local folklore bears many similarities to medieval accounts of witchcraft in Europe. For example, witches can temporarily discard their human form and turn themselves into cats or ants. In this form they can slip out of their house unseen in order to foregather with other witches at a burning-ghat, at midnight on a Saturday. Here they resume human form and ride naked on the backs of hyenas. In European lore all this was described, except that the witches rode on wolves. In both traditions, if a witch was engaged in 'devouring the liver' of a victim she could only be appeased by the slaughter of a kid or a lamb: part of this

sacrifice would be placed in a broken pot and left at a place where three paths meet. These details are observed to this day in countering witchcraft in northern India.

There are many stories about escapes from witches. One such story describes a young bride's joining her husband, the youngest of five brothers, the others being already married. As the most junior wife she was given the hardest work to do and was also invited to dine with them, but she was too shy to do so, and this saved her life because if a woman shares a witch's meal, she too will become a witch. Quite soon, on a Saturday night, she pretended to be asleep when, near midnight, the other wives turned into cats and left the house to join their coven at the cremation ground. She wakened her husband and told him what she had seen. He in turn awoke his brothers and they went together to the burning-ghat where they saw the four wives, stripped naked, riding on hyenas. So they went home, and armed themselves with swords, and when their wives returned in the form of cats they killed them – and in the morning instead of cats, their wives lay dead. The brothers were grateful to their young sister-in-law and asked her to cook for them all, until they married again.

As the weeks and months passed, I was impressed by the number of occasions on which the death or serious illness of a woman or a child was attributed to 'the witch'. In contrast with ghost-afflictions, in which efforts were made to identify the ghost and the cause of his death, the identity of the witch was not revealed. The reason for this was, of course, that the witch was still alive, and would be furious if her secret were revealed. What is more, she was attributed with the magical power of knowing at once if her name was spoken.

This gave rise to a fearful preoccupation with the witch. People wondered who she might be, but almost never dared to discuss the matter, even within the family, for fear of provoking her wrath.

Precisely a hundred years earlier the British Army Captain, C. G. Dixon, published his *Sketch of Mairwar* (1850), in which he commented on the Mairs' enslavement by superstitions. Specifically, he tried to disabuse them of their fear of witches. On one occasion, having heard about a death-dealing witch in the village of Taragarh, near Todgarh, he reined in his horse at the entrance to this village and loudly challenged the witch to demonstrate her supernatural powers, giving her ten minutes in which to do so. The minutes passed without any manifestation, so he claimed before an audience of villagers that this confirmed what he had already repeatedly told them, that there are no such things as witches with magical powers.

He added, rather complacently: 'I flatter myself that the natives of this area will now be less likely to share the prevailing fears concerning witchcraft.' His self-congratulation was premature, because more than a hundred years later these beliefs were still deeprooted in the minds of the local population.

Having learned that it was considered dangerous to utter the witch's name,

I refrained from seeking this information from any of my informants; but as the date of my departure drew near, references to the topic of witches became more frequent and some of those who talked with me seemed to be on the verge of giving me the clue. One of these was Mol Singh whose year-old son Kim Singh had been rescued by Danaji from a witch-affliction; but when I responded to his hints by asking whether he knew the identity of the witch, he hastily changed the subject and told me instead another story about a ghost.

My near neighbour Nol Singh evidently thought the topic altogether too dangerous to be discussed. He had a sickly male child, just over a year old. During the first week of May, 1950, he brought this child, Kum Singh, to my room, and I found him to be undernourished, with a low fever, suffering from diarrhoea and bronchitis. Unfortunately my stock of injectable penicillin was exhausted, so I prescribed powdered sulphonamide and urged his parents to ply him with fluids. On the evening of 9 May, which was the black night of the moon, between two lunar months, I was aware of a good deal of coming and going in Nol Singh's yard. Among his visitors was a man carrying a black goat over his shoulders, so it was not difficult to guess that Nol Singh had consulted another kind of healer and was now preparing to sacrifice this goat at midnight, in order to placate the witch. Quite late that night he came to borrow my lantern and my large *kukri* knife, apologizing in his effusive way and promising to tell me later about the task on which he was engaged.

In due course, I learned that he had indeed consulted the priest at the temple of Ram-Devji; witch-work had been divined, and a goat sacrifice called for. Four other men had joined him in the act of severing the goat's head (as in other symbolic acts, five hands to the task render it more likely to succeed). The head and entrails had been put into a broken pot and left in the jungle, where three paths meet.

Unhappily, the sacrifice was in vain: two nights later I was called to see Kum Singh again and found him now seriously ill with bronchitis. Hoping to be able to find some penicillin in the Health Clinic in Todgarh I borrowed a bicycle and rode there by starlight. I woke up the clinic doctor, but he had no antibiotic of any kind, so all I could do was to inject a small dose of bronchial relaxant, and feed him teaspoonfuls of water. Kum Singh died the following morning, and I attended the hurried interment, together with most of the older men. A young child is not cremated here, but buried in a shallow grave over which a heap of thorn branches and large stones is built, to ensure that scavenging jackals and hyenas are kept off. As soon as the ceremony was over, we adjourned to the well to bathe and to wash the clothes we had been wearing. In our dry clothes we adjourned with Nol Singh to his house, to sit with him for a time in sympathy.

I felt disappointed at having been unable to do more to help this child, but Nol Singh did not reproach me. On the contrary, he had already thanked me during the sitting for having cycled to Todgarh at dead of night, risking the attack of man-eating panthers. Thirty years later he still recalled that fruitless

ride and described its dangers in even more exaggerated terms.

After Kum Singh's death, the topic of the unnamed witch recurred still more frequently. Deva Regar was one who talked about the mischief that she had done, but dared not utter her name; old Amta Singh gave me a catalogue of deaths which she had caused; as also did Nathu Singh. Finally, on 30 May, it was the two young boys, Dau Singh and Til Singh, who were the first to identify the witch. They had been engaged on drawing human figures, in my room. When Til Singh showed me his drawing, it was of a woman and, he added, 'a dakan'. I said: 'Is this the Sujarupa dakan?'

By way of reply, Til Singh nodded vigorously towards the nearby room occupied by Dhapu, Hira Singh's mother.

'I whispered: 'The old woman?'

At this, Dau Singh cut in, saying, 'Yes, Hira Singh's mother. She's done a lot of harm, that old woman.'

Til Singh looked relieved that the secret was out, and said: 'Yes, she's made many people sick, with her witch-work. She made me sick too,' (pointing to his left leg, where there was a chronic infection of the bone, perhaps tuberculous).

Panna Singh must have spoken with these two soon after this because he too came into my room and nodded his head to confirm what I had been told: that my nearest neighbour was the witch.

The next person to break the taboo against identifying the witch was blind Umibai. On 12 June, a week before my departure, she had been regaling me with vivid accounts of her dreams, which included encounters with snakes, ghosts and brigands. Then she described a sudden attack of lumbago (in my terminology) which was attributed by the priest of Ram Devji to the ghost of her late husband. She was advised to wear a silver medallion of Ram Devji but could not afford to do so, so she prayed to the god instead and within a day or two the pain and stiffness in her back went away, and struck Mal Singh in her place: for a month he could not stand upright without someone's support. Then he had a medallion made for five and a quarter rupees and, when he wore it, the pain soon disappeared.

This story seemed to have awakened other painful memories, because she followed it by whispering to me: 'If I tell you about witches and ghosts, she will be angry, that one over there,' (nodding towards Dhapu's house).

I said: 'Do you mean Hira Singh's mother?'

'Yes, it was she who made me blind. That's why she gets angry – she's one herself. I was sick for three months and the priest at Ram Devji's temple told me it was due to a witch, who required the sacrifice of a goat – but I could not afford it. I kept trembling all the time and sometimes I spoke with her voice, not my own, and the voice said: "If you give me a black goat, two and half years old, you will get better." But when I could not give a goat, I suddenly became blind – just like that. If she had killed me outright, it would have been better.'

Umi complained that none of her husband's family had offered to sacrifice

a goat for her; but then recalled that only four weeks ago Nol Singh had made such a sacrifice for his son Kum Singh, but in vain.

Umibai went on to tell me that Dhapu has sometimes given her food, which she has accepted; but she takes care not to eat with her, for fear that she might also become a witch.

On the following day, Himat Singh and Umibai were both in my room when the former told me how some women are enlisted into their company by other witches, while others are doomed to be witches because they were born at an inauspicious moment. He went on to say that if he, or one of his children, were struck by the witch he would go straight to her and threaten to beat her to death unless she promised to desist. He would do this because there is an old saying that the witch will spare one house in a village; so if a man sets about her fiercely, his will be the house that she does not strike.

It was noticeable that in spite of his bravado he still avoided mentioning the witch's name; but Umi was not so restrained. She described an occasion, some ten years earlier, when she and the witch came to blows: 'We were quarrelling, Hira Singh's mother and I, and I said: "You witch, you have brought this blindness on me." She said: "Who are you calling a witch?" I said: "You!" Then she went away but came back quietly, with a stick, and gave me three hard blows with it. I wrestled with her, and threw her down, and sat on top of her. (At this point Himat Singh became very agitated, and left the room.)

Umi went on: 'I caught her by the throat, and said: "Now I'm going to kill you." But she begged: "Oh Umi, I'll eat your shit – let me go." Then Pitha Singh's wife and Hama Singh's wife came, and separated us. I was furious. I told Dhapu: "If they hadn't separated us I'd have killed you and died myself – the Government would surely have killed me." Ever since then she has not quarrelled with me at all, she has behaved very carefully towards me.'

Umi said that there is no other woman in Sujarupa who is believed to be a witch; but there used to be two old women in Hamaton ki Guar now both dead who were witches: 'They didn't even spare their own sons: they ate up their very sons. One of them had eight grandsons, and she ate them all.'

Later, on the same day, I had a long conversation with Dhapu, who was in a mellow mood. She told me that at first she did not like my habit of writing things in my notebooks: 'At first I thought you were just writing idly, but now that I know it is of use to you, I'll tell you all I can.' She went on to recall the improved yield of her late husband's fields, when Hira Singh came home from the army; and to speak tolerantly about Hira Singh's fondness for offering hospitality to his fellow-bhagats who came to join in sessions of hymn-singing. She talked about her best friends in the village, putting Umi at the head of her list: 'There are Umibai, and Kesibai, and Jhumibai. The one I liked best of all was Puran Singh's mother – she's dead now. I'm very fond of Gomin Singh's mother and of Mal Singh's mother – the old women.'

It occurred to me as I read my notes that nearly everything she said was the

very opposite of her true feelings – especially her denial of quarrels with her son, and with other women. Perhaps the same applied to her flattering reference to my impending departure: 'Sahib has stayed very nicely among us. You have been very good to our children, you played with them as though they were your own: you have been as sweet as *gur* to us.'

At the same time I felt sympathy for the unhappiness that she must have experienced for years, from the knowledge that her fellow-villagers (perhaps even including her son and daughter-in-law) believed her to be a witch. I decided to ask her what she felt about this, before I left. The opportunity arose on the 16 June, the eve of my departure. We had been talking amicably for a little while, when I asked if she had any more dreams to tell me.

She replied: 'I haven't had any dreams, what can I tell? Won't you take these notebooks, and some official person will read them?'

I assured her, not for the first time, that no official would be shown my notebooks, but she persisted: 'It's just that you write down all our names, so we suspect that someone will see them.'

In spite of this, she gave me a vivid account of a dream about three thieves, who stole ripe corn from their fields, but Hira Singh caught them and beat them, and later in the dream Hira Singh accused Pitha Singh of helping the thieves, and they came to blows, and finally Pitha Singh came to them with two handfuls of money, saying: 'Here, take this.' (This dream has echoes of an old dispute over land, in which Pitha Singh was their chief opponent.)

At this point, I said that I had heard about a fight in which she had been involved with Umi, in the course of which she had been accused of being a witch: could she tell me about that?

Characteristically, she began with a complete denial: 'No, she never said that: we never quarrelled.' Then, after a pause: 'Yes, we did quarrel, nearly ten years ago. She abused me, and I beat her. We have not quarrelled since.'

'Did she really call you a witch?'

'No, I never heard that. If she said that, I didn't hear it with my ears. Who told you that she said that? I have never called anyone a dakan; no, Babuji, I have never called anyone a dakan.'

Dhapu was becoming increasingly agitated, so I tried to calm her by saying: 'She was just telling about an old quarrel that is finished now.'

Dhapu replied, 'If anyone says these things, I'll give them abuse, I'll give you abuse too. I'll be glad to see you go. All these people who came to see you keep drinking my water – my head is broken with carrying pots of water for them.' (This was a grievance which she had not mentioned before: most households in this community take pride in offering a drink of water to a guest – a meritorious act which reflects credit on the host.) She went on: 'That blind one, she is a bad character. She has no sense, that's why she is blind. Look at me, I have my two eyes. If she tells lies, I'll take a stick to her again.'

She went on to pour scorn on Umi's incompetence in handling a problem of inheritance of her first husband's fields, and compared this unfavourably

with her own success in protecting her son Hira Singh's interests while he was away on military service. Her anger mounted again: 'I'll give that Umi a beating for telling you such things.'

I said: 'Don't do that – she's blind.'

Dhapu replied: 'I'll beat her over the head: I'll teach her to call me a dakan.' Then, a moment later: 'I was only joking. I shall not really hit her. I give her grain to eat when she is hungry – we live on good terms now. But she is stupid, and I could tell you bad things about her.'

My attempt at sympathizing with Dhapu's situation as a supposed witch was unsuccessful. Instead, I saw a sudden, ferocious outburst of temper which made it easier to understand why her fellow-villagers feared her and were ready to believe that she was engaged in witches' work. She seemed unable to accept my assurance that I did not believe that she was a witch, and that I thought it was unfair that she should be so regarded. When I left the village, on 17 June, she was conspicuous by her absence from the crowd of villagers who saw me off – just as she had deliberately absented herself, for the last decade, from weddings or other celebrations in the households against whom she had to contend in the struggle over Hira Singh's inheritance. Unlike her son, she was evidently capable of bearing a grudge for a long time, and unable to realize that her own belligerence made it easier for the others to think of her as a witch.

My gradual discovery not only of what a witch was believed to be like, but also of who was believed to be the village witch, took place during the first six months of 1950. Now, seven months later, the witch had struck again (as the villagers saw it) or superstitious beliefs had caused the death of an innocent old woman (as outsiders equally stubbornly interpreted what had happened). As my train neared Kambli Ghat I was vividly aware of the crisis of fear, anger and violence which had led to Dhapu's painful death; and I wondered what pitch of hostility still prevailed between those who deplored her death and those who thought the village well rid of her. When I cycled into Sujarupa there was indeed a cloud of mistrust and apprehension hanging over the whole community.

In true village fashion, they greeted me with courtesies, and at first talked about anything other than the matter in hand. This was a large, mixed group among whom I could recognize some who were sympathetic to Hira Singh, the son of Dhapu, and others who supported the three who were still imprisoned in the police station at Bhim, fifteen miles away.

I saw that it would be necessary for me to talk with the two groups separately, and began with those who wanted to settle the matter by giving an agreed sum in compensation to Hira Singh, and effecting the release of the three from the police cell. Their spokesman was Devi Singh, so we adjourned to his house, set lookouts to see that nobody was eavesdropping, and talked in low tones. They were in agreement about Hira Singh's entitlement to a sum of money in compensation for his mother's death – indeed, on the day after the

assault, Devi Singh had given Hira Singh eighty rupees as a first payment in compensation and Hira Singh said that he would not take the matter any further. But on the third day, Dhapu died of her wounds; and a week later Hira Singh filed a complaint with the police, who came and beat all those whose names he had cited until Raja Singh, Rama Singh, and Nim Singh all admitted to having struck her, as also did Mot Singh's wife (also called Dhapu).

It was in fact this Dhapu's illness which had brought matters to a head. She had been feverish for a week before the confrontation with the 'witch', frequently became possessed, when the witch spoke through her, saying that she would not spare her life. She was taken to the shrine of Danaji, whose Bhopa said that Danaji's power was not strong enough to overcome this witch. When she was brought back to the village she became possessed again, and openly denounced the old woman Dhapu – and this prompted the beating. Once Dhapu had been struck until she lost consciousness, Mot Singh's wife ceased to be possessed and soon began to feel herself again. At first she also was imprisoned, but after a preliminary hearing of the case in Bhim, on 31 January, 1951, she was released on bail of one thousand rupees.

Devi Singh's group contended that Hira Singh should have taken his complaint to the village *panchayat* (council) and accepted their decision about a settlement. Instead, by going to the police he had brought the scourge and extortion of a police investigation upon the village and this could not be quickly forgiven.

They asked me to plead with the magistrate on behalf of the accused, and to draw his attention to some lies in Hira Singh's account; for example, he said that she died almost immediately from her injuries whereas she had died only on the third day, and Hira Singh himself had taken his proper part in her cremation.

Next morning, I had an opportunity of talking with Hira Singh in his house, together with his sympathizers Nathu/Dalla, Himat Singh, Panna Singh and Partab Chand, a potter. Hira Singh told me that those who had led the attack on his mother not only intended to kill her, but had also threatened to take his life.

The group went on to demonstrate where on her face Hira Singh's mother had been struck with axe-blows, and how the bones of her left forearm had been broken. Both Nathu Singh and Hira Singh tried to stop the beating, but the latter was knocked down and temporarily lost consciousness. Nathu Singh said: 'Next morning early, the accused Raja and Rama and Nim and also Pitha, Hama, and others, took her up from the dust and carried her quickly to the burning-ghat.' Hira Singh agreed that he had taken part in the funeral: 'I was afraid that if I didn't go they would kill me too. They would have killed me during the night if Nathu Singh had not been there with me.'

I asked whether Dhapu had been killed because her attackers thought that she was practising witchcraft. At first both Nathu Singh and Hira Singh

denied this; but almost at once the latter agreed, saying: 'They did it because they said, those people, that she was a witch and that she had eaten up so many people. They said this, and so they beat her. They said: "You have eaten up all our people, we shall put you to death." '

Hira Singh repeated the account of the young Dhapu's having been taken to the Danaji – 'But the Danaji would never tell anyone to beat the old woman like that. Now the magistrate has called Danaji's Bhopa for interrogation.'

I asked if it was true that another woman had been killed, as a witch, within the last few days. Nathu Singh said: 'No, nothing has happened like this,' but old Himat Singh contradicted him: 'Yes, in Sarod village; a woman was killed.'

Hira Singh said: 'They should have gone to the Rawats' caste meeting and said: "She is doing witch's work." Then they would be heard, and the caste committee would pronounce sentence upon her – or else they would be told: "Do not talk like that." '

After the others had left, Hira Singh and Nathu Singh came very close to me and spoke in whispers, saying that things could not be allowed to go on like this: people must be taught that they cannot go about beating and threatening as they have been doing here. This is why they mean to persevere with the case in spite of all the threats.

'If they kill me, they kill me,' said Hira Singh.

Next day I met the magistrate and conveyed my concern over the violence and strife which had surfaced in Sujarupa as a result of Dhapubai's having been beaten so severely as to cause her death. I found the magistrate to be familiar with local beliefs about the prevalence of witches and their death-dealing powers. He said that these superstitions are still widely believed in this region. Only a few weeks previously he had received reports of a witch's being killed in another village, not many miles from Bhim. He saw it as his task to try to educate the villagers, while at the same time demonstrating that the law of the land demanded punishment if a supposed witch was killed. He allowed me to have a brief meeting with Rama, Raja and Niba (the family name of Nim Singh) in the cell in which they were imprisoned. They were anxious, indeed tearful, but my visit seemed to give them hope. Before leaving Sujarupa that evening I was able to communicate to both parties my impression that the magistrate was a fair and reasonable man who understood, even though he did not share, local beliefs about witchcraft. I believed that he would warn the accused that the law could not tolerate the killing of supposed witches, but also that his sentences would not be too severe.

Two months later, on 14 March 1951, I spent another night in Todgarh and met members of the two factions in the village. I was interested to observe that the anti-Hira group now talked very little about the death of Dhapu; instead they rehearsed the old grievance about Hira Singh's having inherited an undivided estate – and about the stealthy way in which that had been arranged.

I also met Rama Singh, temporarily released from prison because of illness. He asked me to certify him as unfit to attend the court hearing in the following week, but I was unable to do so: he appeared to have gained weight rather than lost it, while in the cells.

Hira Singh also talked with me at some length. At first he would only talk about his harvest, which was going to be very good this year. Gradually, he spoke about the killing of Dhapu. He said, bitterly, that only two nights before this happened, there had been a big assembly for bhajan-singing in the *paul:* 'We were all there, Devi Singh, Rama Singh, Mot Singh, Nim Singh and all. And my mother, she and Raju's wife, and Hama's wife, and Devi Singh's mother all ate from the same *thali* [a brass dish] that night – and then, only two nights later, they went and killed her.'

He reproached Rama Singh, who pretends to be a bhagat – and yet he was the first to take an axe to the old woman. And Devi Singh, whom he thought to be a real friend, did nothing to stop them. He concluded our talk by saying: 'I am sorry that you ever left. If you had stayed, this evil thing would never have happened. They were afraid of you – they would not have done such a thing while your were here.'

Six days later the case was heard in court: Raja Singh and Nim Singh were given six months' imprisonment, but released only a month later; Rama Singh was judged the most responsible (perhaps because, as a literate ex-soldier, he should have known better) and was given an eighteen-month sentence – but was released after one year.

In October 1951, my wife and I spent a night in Todgarh while driving from Jaipur to Udaipur with our six-weeks-old daughter. Next morning we paused at Sujarupa where the whole village crowded round to see the baby. Susy was pink-cheeked, blue-eyed and had delicate blond hair over her head. Several of the women stroked her head, exclaiming: 'Gunji hai, Bechara' (She's bald, poor thing!). They were accustomed to newborn babies who arrived with plenty of short black hair on their scalps. There was a holiday-like atmosphere in the village during our brief visit and I particularly noted that Hira Singh and his ally Nol Singh were joining quite naturally in the celebration of our visit. Although Rama Singh was still serving his prison sentence his release was expected quite soon. The tension and mistrust seemed to have nearly gone. A sign of this change was the formal – though cheerful – welcome given to me by my two 'sisters', a courtesy which has been observed in all my subsequent visits.

There was a gap of nearly nine years before my next visit to Sujarupa, early in 1960. During a brief stay at Devi Singh's house I observed that Hira Singh was a participant in a session of bhajan-singing and was in fact regarded as one of the most ardent devotees. In subsequent visits I confirmed the impression that the old animosities over his privileged inheritance, on the one hand, and the manner of Dhapu's death, on the other, had died down. This was even more marked in 1980 and 1981, when Hira Singh had become one of

the respected elders. His son, Partab Singh, now carried the major share of work in their fields, and he in turn had two sons who were already beginning to join in this work, and who would, in the fullness of time, each inherit an equal share of these fields.

Hira Singh now seemed reluctant to discuss the old quarrel about his legacy or his mother's death. He did not, however, appear to be nursing a deep-seated grievance; on the contrary, he seemed to be on genuinely good terms with Devi Singh and all those who attended the singing of bhajans. One afternoon (19 March, 1981) I went with Ram Singh to see the new well which is being dug beside a field recently cleared on the edge of the jungle. To my surprise, Hira Singh joined us on this occasion and spent the next two hours in our company. After inspecting progress on the new well we adjourned to sit in the shade beside another well which Ram Singh and his brother Moti Singh had inherited from their father. Ram Singh did most of the talking, about his plans for his fields and about changes in the village. He treated Hira Singh with respect, as an older relative. In particular, he deferred to Hira Singh's greater knowledge of the world as a result of his travels abroad during the Second World War. Hira Singh let his companion dominate our conversation. While appreciating some changes for the better in recent years he did not share the younger man's impatience for new things, such as electricity, to reach Sujarupa. What chiefly impressed me, however, was the relaxed friendliness which they showed towards each other. Clearly, they had succeeded in burying their memories of thirty years ago when Ram Singh took part in the killing of Hira Singh's mother, and when, as a result of Hira Singh's exertions, Ram Singh had served a prison sentence for manslaughter.

I have described this episode because it demonstrates forcefully how tenacious supernatural beliefs can be. Such stubborn beliefs must serve a social and/or a psychological role. One function such beliefs serve in a community in which the deaths of infants, children and young women are all too common is to provide a scapegoat: the women of Sujarupa mourned these premature deaths with bitter grief but instead of reproaching themselves they directed their anger at the nearby witch. Fear of the witch, together with suppressed anger, was every mother's experience when her children fell sick. This is an important element in the Rawats' outlook on the world as a dangerous place in which evil spirits lie in wait for the unwary – but at the same time it is not easily disclosed or discussed, out of fear of what the witch might do. When I re-read my thirty-year-old notes in the light of Dhapu's tragic death – one of who knows how many hundreds a year in India's more than half a million villages – I saw a new significance in social contexts in which villagers would be aware of witch danger, without daring to articulate their fear. It will recur in later chapters of this book, just as it does in the lives of Rawat men, women and children – especially the women.

3

Principal Informants

During my first stay in Sujarupa I was soon aware that some men of the village were more eager than others to talk with me about their lives, their beliefs and their community's history. I was happy to encourage them to talk, and to pause between such conversations to make a record of what they had told me. (I soon found that if I wrote too many notes during an interview they became self-conscious and inhibited: such note-taking was perceived as threatening.)

After having spent ten weeks in Sujarupa I took a little time out to marshall my impressions of the individuals and families who, up to this point, had been particularly informative. The following pages are borrowed almost verbatim from those preliminary assessments, dated 29 March, 1950. Here, when I use 'we' or 'us' this includes my helpers Amar Singh, Prem Chand Jain and one or two outsiders who paid brief visits to Sujarupa during my stay.

Devi Singh's Family

The longer we stay in the village, the more evident it becomes that Devi Singh is the liveliest and most forceful personality here. He has had several years' experience of the life of millworkers in Ahmedabad and has learned a little about the gadgets of the civilized world, but he prefers to live in the village. However, the village cannot contain him: he loves to move around, meet people, gossip and do business. Hence, after a first venture in village shopkeeping, he has now come to make the trading (and occasional black-marketing) of local food-grains his chief preoccupation.

He is a big, dark-complexioned man, with a suggestion of carefree jauntiness in all he does, from his walk, and his cycling, to his way of tying his yellow *safa* (headdress) and to the assertive bustle of his *dhoti* (loincloth). He is fond of a joke, and does not mind infinite repetition of a good one, such as the conversations he and I have in mock English. We frequently taunt and tease each other, and more than once, after a hilarious session, Devi Singh has exclaimed – 'This is going to be a dull place when you go away!'

He is not clever, but he is intelligent; thus he has taught himself to read and

write, though he does not go so far as to read books. His writing consists solely of keeping accounts. He has taught himself to play the sitar, and has a large repertoire of bhajans which he has learned by heart from hearing others sing them – he gets the words mixed up sometimes, and is apt to confuse their meaning. In the bhajan-singing sessions of the village, which he more than anyone else promotes, he is prominent in singing and playing, but he seldom speaks when they are debating the moral of the song. Devi Singh is not exceptionally handsome, but he has a fine, swaggering carriage and a bold manner, which supports his assertion that he used to be a devil with the girls, until he turned over a new leaf some years ago. His new morality rests lightly on him, however: he is our best informant about swearwords, obscene songs, and local sexual misdemeanours. He also is the most eloquent of all the village in voicing their beliefs and superstitions, all of which he accepts. He claims to know several healing mantars and practises them (in the treatment of a sick goat, for example). He knows more than anyone about omens, and follows them (he will return from a mission if two bad omens occur at the outset). Although well-versed in the practical details of such beliefs and observances, he does not claim to know much about the whys and wherefores of them; when we ask for reasons, or for the mythology behind a given form of worship, if he does not know, he refers us to someone who is better informed in these matters. He is our main standby in the village for practical advice and for getting things done. At my request he has kept written accounts of all the transactions he does for us, which we square up periodically: he charges us fair prices, and carries out many additional services for nothing.

He is obviously fond of his wife, Dakhu, an attractive, shy girl of about eighteen. Devi Singh likes to refer to her teasingly in front of us, so that she is embarrassed – but she appears to enjoy it too. We have had little conversation with her, although she did consent to do the Indian version of the Thematic Apperception Test with us one afternoon. Our impression is that were it not for her consciousness of the strict proprieties, she would talk quite readily. Amar Singh has seen more of her, in negotiating for milk, and getting our wheat ground. He has acquired a great affection for her – in his cups at the time of a recent Hindu festival he gave her a present, told her she was his sister and greeted Devi Singh as brother-in-law. Dakhu is a busy, capable wife: although she does not communicate with us much we get glimpses of a good-humoured, quick-witted girl. Her first child – a daughter – was born on 23 March, 1950.

Devi Singh's mother is taller than the other old women, lean, bent, wrinkled, rheumaticky. She has a harsh grumbling voice and a brusque manner, but in fact she is one of the friendliest persons here. She will talk with us readily when she has time from her work about the house and the farm and does our tests, though protesting that she is not capable of them. She is proud of her two sons and works uncomplainingly in their houses when their children are born. We seldom see her speaking to either of her

daughters-in-law, but when she does, or when she refers to them, her manner is relaxed and friendly.

Her older son Gomin Singh is a tall, lean, very hardworking man. He has been away at the mills for a time, but much prefers to work on the farm. He looks after the crops of Devi Singh and of Puran Singh and Kishan Singh as well as his own and, as soon as his harvest was over, went to work at the dam in Lakhaguda. He is a modest, unassertive man, friendly when approached, but unobtrusive. In my first days in the tent, he was a frequent evening visitor; since then he has not come so often, but is always helpful when consulted. He is less humorous, less adventurous, less impressive than his brother Devi Singh; he is less ardent in bhajan-singing and less of a rascal when he sowed his wild oats. He stands for industry and solid worth. He is usually present in village panch meetings of the adult males, does not speak much and, when he does, his voice is drowned by those of others speaking louder.

His wife is about twenty years old, and very shy: I have had no personal dealings with her since her confinement. Gomin Singh's first child, a boy, was born on 20 January. At first, he was called Latchman Singh but he was sick and off his food frequently, so they changed his name to Ghisa Singh and since then he has been healthier.

Nol Singh's Family

Nol Singh is a powerfully-built man, as befits the best-fed member of the village community. He is about five feet eleven inches tall, upright and soldierly, with a severely pockmarked face and an ingratiating manner. From his army service, he remembers a few words of English which he likes to use: 'Good morning, Sar, you quite all right, Sar? Taking bath, Sar? Very good, very good.'

He is a restless man, always working. Whenever one meets him, he makes a series of polite remarks, always ending with a series of 'very goods', 'Every thing very good, all right, *thik* [that's good] Sahib.' No one else in the village shares his compulsion to reassure me about nothing. Coupled with this is his habit at intervals of making me a little speech saying how much the village appreciates my being there, and how sad they will be when I go. When I leave on any excursion, he always pauses in his work to shake hands and say 'Come back soon'. The others say it too, but he is more effusive and seemingly less sincere.

We hear many stories of his meanness and his incessant hard work. In March, when there was little to do in the fields, he hired a skilled wall-builder, and labouring help from his fellow-villagers, and set to work to build a tall, strong stone wall round his house, to replace the usual thorn-fence enclosure. He worked hard at this, early and late, breaking stones in the nearby jungle. His wife and two older children helped him carry the stones to the wall-builder. He showed me this wall, and its future shape, and his house, with great pride, at the same time asserting (with his usual clumsy exaggera-

tion) that he was just a poor man, and this was a poor house. He frequently says that he would like to join up in the army again to earn some money, but takes no active steps about it, though recruiting has been going on in Beawar lately.

On the obverse side of his smiling and effusive front is a latent bad temper. This is not provoked very frequently: we have twice heard him shouting abuse and threats at Mesa, who is the bad boy of the village; Mesa rates him as the chief among those who get angry with him. In panch meetings, Nol Singh speaks reasonably and forcefully: he is listened to, but influences them more by the sense of his argument than by any personal prestige. He is literate and quite intelligent.

His wife Dhapu is shy, hidden, crushed: we have not seen much of her. His oldest child is Gunga bai, an ugly pockmarked girl of fifteen, with a large nose, wide mouth and forward manner. She is like the plain girl in the crowd, who never knows when she is not wanted. She has made a prolonged stay at home, although she was married some years ago, long before puberty, but she seems in no hurry to take up adult married life. At home, she helps with the work, fetches water, minds the baby, carries stones for her father's wall, drives beasts to the watering-trough, and bosses her younger brother, Panna Singh (aged twelve).

These two seem fond of each other and are often in each other's company. Panna is sometimes given a spell carrying the baby. He is wide-mouthed, big-nosed, broad-faced but with a ready smile. He is easily the most intelligent among the Rawat boys. He is more privileged than the rest: his father sends him to school, plans for him to go to high school, and have a career as a clerk or petty official. Panna is very friendly, obliging; very curious about everything we do, and does our tests willingly. He has to be chased off sometimes, when we are testing or interviewing someone else, and he then becomes disappointed, jealous, and sulks for minutes or hours: but as soon as he is greeted and teased and pushed about a bit, he grins all over and is happy again.

He is spoiled by his father, in that he is not kept constantly at work as are most of the other boys (tending goats, drawing water, keeping the fields, etc.). Even while the wall-building is going on, he manages to take time off to frequent our premises both before and after school. He goes to school at any time between 10.30 and 12 and comes back at about 5.30 p.m. He talks to us readily about the things he knows, such as village gossip; but he is at the giggling stage where sexual matters are concerned. He seems very conscious of the fact that he will soon be old enough to sleep with the little girl to whom he was married two years ago. She is at her mother's home just now but is to be brought to stay in Nol Singh's household in a few days' time.

Panna Singh is still childish, but is approaching the threshold of grown-up activities, and his father urges him on. (For example, his father remained behind at the time of Moti Singh's wedding, and let Panna Singh go alone

with the wedding party.) He talks quite good Hindi, but is more fluent in dialect. He likes to attend satsangs, plays the majera rather inexpertly, but does not sing. He likes to be noticed. (Unhappily this clever youngster did not live to fulfil his promise, because he died at the age of sixteen.)

Ham Singh's Family

Ham Singh is the handsomest man in Sujarupa. He is nearly six feet tall, has an upright bearing, calm and dignified expression, fine grey beard and moustache. He has always been courteous and friendly towards us, without being officious. Early on, he said he hoped I would come to his son Moti's wedding: he made us welcome and opposed the complaints raised by Pitha Singh at non-Rawats joining in the wedding feast. We responded with a small feast for Moti and Dakhu, his younger sister, before their respective weddings, with gifts and garlands.

He appears generally as a benevolent, dignified, absentminded man. He shows real affection for his two sons, Moti Singh and Rup Singh, but did not seem so much concerned at the wedding of his daughter Dakhu, floating around the periphery of the proceedings, letting others do the shouting. We feel that he is one of our most dependable, though undemonstrative, friends in the village.

His wife does not often emerge from her house, but when she does she talks with us quite readily (rating third in this respect after Moti/Surat's mother, and Devi Singh's mother). She was seen to best advantage during the women's holiday-time, while Moti's wedding party had virtually emptied the village of men. She benevolently cheered on the younger women in their brief saturnalia.

Ham Singh's older son Rup Singh is a soldier. He came home for Moti's wedding, getting twenty-one days' leave. He is a sharp, jovial fellow, with a mischievous glint in his eye. He decidedly prefers army life to staying in the village. He considers himself smarter than those who stay at home – a man of the world. He gives a superficial impression of cleverness, owing to his good address and quick repartee, but does not prove either very well-informed or very quick to grasp ideas when one talks with him at length. He is just clever enough to wonder what my work consists of, but too slow-witted to understand my repeated explanations, so he suspects me of some hidden, sinister motive. As a result, although he is always friendly in conversation with us, and consents to do our personality tests, he tells the others, half jokingly and half in earnest, not to have anything to do with them.

As older brother, he played the chief role in supervising the arrangements for the weddings of his younger brother and sister early in March 1950. He made me welcome at both these ceremonies, and called me to see his *puja* (a ritual of worship) to Hanuman, shortly before he returned to the army, at the end of his leave.

His younger brother Moti Singh, aged twenty, has been one of our earliest and most constant friends since I first set up my tent. He is a quiet unassuming youth, good-looking and good-natured. His daily work (with a break during the days before and after his wedding) has consisted in grazing the family goats in the jungle. He has been a friend of Amar Singh's since the first, and a willing though shy informant. He seems genuinely unsophisticated. His friends Devi Singh and and Dau Singh take it for granted that he had sex experience before his marriage, but he himself is too shy to discuss the subject. He showed his pleasure, in an inarticulate way, when we greeted him as Vind Rajah (royal bridegroom), when we feasted him, and when we escorted him to his wedding. But he is tongue-tied and does not express himself readily.

He is more amiable than outstanding in character, a person who is well liked, but tends to be overlooked in a crowd. He is easily contented and unambitious – or if he is ambitious, he conceals it well. (I had no inkling, in 1950, that he would become a chronic alcoholic and an embarrassment to his family in later years.)

His younger sister Dakhu, whose wedding we also attended, was quite the best-looking of the girls of the village, with a small ring through her left nostril, a long upper lip, and a quizzical smile as if she wondered what we were up to all the time. She took her wedding very calmly, wailed and wept in the approved style when it was time for her to leave home – and came back for a homesick visit at the earliest opportunity.

Amta Singh's Family

Old Amta (or Himat) Singh is always referred to as the poorest man in the village, and looks it. His clothes and his turban are ragged and torn. He himself is lean and hungry-looking, with a straggling black and grey beard. He is regarded as something of a simpleton, and is no good at numbers – he cannot remember, without an effort, how many children he has, or their ages. On the other hand, he has a vivid memory of some at least of his adventures in the First World War, when he served in Mesopotamia; and he knows better than most the genealogy of the village members, back to Suja/Rupa himself. He is mild-mannered, courteous and inured to misfortune and hardship. I have never heard him speak angrily, yet he must have frequent provocation, because his son (the second son, the oldest being away at work) is constantly getting into trouble.

Mesa Singh is the village bad boy. He tells lies, steals things, neglects his work, lets animals stray into other people's grain – all the cardinal vices against the village code. He is the one we hear most frequently abused, and the one we most often have to tell to put that down, or clear out of here. He is big for his age, which is thirteen, is longlegged and thin, but strongest of the boys under fifteen, whom he sometimes bullies. His failing, or his symptom,

is that he is always pushing himself in where he is not wanted, and getting bawled out in consequence. He is not a nice boy, being untrustworthy and a telltale. He is well aware of the distrust and detestation which he arouses, and sometimes seems to revel in it and to go on being 'bad'; at other times, he tries to overcompensate by drawing attention to his momentary good behaviour. In spite of many rebuffs, he always comes back, rather like the village pariah dogs. Like their hunger for food is his appetite for *bidis* (the local substitute for cigarettes) and if not watched closely he will help himself to mine.

In spite of his unreliability, I sense a craving for reassurance and for affection in this problem child. His father treats him well, but too leniently: Mesa is made to do only a small share of the family work – he loafs around much of the time while his father, mother and young brother are working in the fields.

In contrast, his younger brother, Teja Singh, works hard all day long. He is a thin pockmarked little boy of about nine or ten. He is miserably dressed, in tattered short pants and sometimes the ruins of a green vest. His characteristic attitude throughout the cold weather has been to stand with elbows close to his sides, hands clasped and held near his chin, his long shoulders and thighs showing through his rags. He sometimes has a torn cloth wrapped round his shoulders.

In spite of his pinched, half-frozen appearance, he will always break into a very charming shy smile when he is noticed or spoken to. At first he was so shy that he used to hide behind others, when we looked at him or called his name. Now (29 March, 1950) he is much more confident, plays about our room in the evenings and takes paper to draw pictures for us. He is too shy to talk to us at length, but I feel this will come.

Teja Singh does a long day's work every day. He is out early in the fields, scaring off birds and animals from the crops; he is kept busy tending goats or working in the fields, or taking beasts to be watered or carrying straw. He is sometimes given charge of a baby, and sometimes is accompanied by his younger sister, Mithu.

Teja has every reason to be mean or unhappy, yet he has the sunniest nature of any child in the village, and beams with happiness when one plays with him; I have never seen him abusing or pushing around any other child.

Asa Singh's Family

Asa Singh is one of the elders of the village, and one of the richest in lands, grain and debts. He has a longstanding feud with a moneylender in Bhim, which is conducted for the most part by his forceful, aggressive eldest son, Chatar Singh. Asa Singh is a small, bent grey-bearded man, who keeps to his own house and does not appear often in the general activities of the village. In panch meetings he speaks, but does not carry authority: there, as elsewhere, Chatar Singh speaks for him.

Principal Informants

Chatar Singh is tall, lean, powerful. He is abrupt in speech and protests his goodwill so insistently and so unconvincingly that one always wonders what he wants: his spells of attendance at our room, and of offering personal and story material, are generally followed by some request, such as, that I employ him in my service, or that I intervene in his court case, etc. He is a determined, moderately intelligent man; has learned to read and write, reads Hindu legends, has a better than average knowledge of the reasons behind local religious practices, and is always willing to tell me about them. He quarrelled repeatedly with his first wife, and so took a second one two years ago. His younger brother Nathu Singh is very like Chatar Singh, also tall, lean, hardworking. He too is very demanding in his approach towards me – in the early days of my stay he kept asking me to teach him English, and then producing Hindi-English primers and suggesting that I start now: when he at length became convinced that I did not intend to teach him English, he gave up coming near me, and absorbed himself in the work of the farm. He seldom shows up at village group meetings or at satsangs. The third brother, Til Singh, is very much younger – only about eleven years old. He is quite unlike the other two: a small attractively-featured, almost effeminate boy, who talks with a lisp and is teased about it by the other boys. He gets on well with them all in spite of that. He is shy but friendly, and likes to come about our house. He goes to school.

Ban Singh, sixteen-year-old son of Chatar Singh by his first wife, does not resemble his father in appearance, being undersized and fox-faced: but he does take after him in qualities of drive and capability. He is quicker-witted than his father, a willing and interesting informant. He lives with his mother, who dwells in the same household as his father, occupying a separate room; and he has seen many quarrels between them. He is a hardbitten boy, tough to the younger children: he has not a particularly sunny nature, but he likes to be with us and often invites us to come and pass time with him while he works at grazing goats in the jungle.

We have not had personal contacts with any of the women in this family.

Mal Singh's Family

The oldest of this family group is Mal Singh's mother, who is about sixty, and nearly blind. She is an agreeable old lady, but not easy to talk to, because she talks only Marwari, and does not understand much Hindi. She suffers from rheumatism as well as from longstanding cataract: she does not move far from the house and is usually seen sitting in the thorn-fence enclosure just opposite their *paul*, lying in the sun on a stone platform, or stumbling and mumbling about the dark doorway of Mal Singh's living quarters. When we asked her to look at our test pictures, she refused, quite goodnaturedly; pointing up to the sky she said several times: 'Ask me in heaven.'

Mal Singh's wife is several years younger than he, in her mid-thirties. She

is a shy person, scrupulous to veil herself, and does not allow her voice to be heard. She did one card of the TAT, protesting that she could not do it – and then bolted. She succeeds in remaining anonymous, so that when I see two or three veiled women coming from the well, I can never distinguish her from the others.

Of the next generation, Samp Singh is the oldest. He is a quiet, slow-thinking youth, deliberate in speech and gesture, modest, unassuming, rather slow-witted and much aware of the fact, so that in conversation he lets the others do most of the talking, and when we ask him about anything he tends to get confused, and tells us to ask someone else. He is a capable worker and takes his part as an adult in all the normal operations of the fields, but seldom speaks at panch meetings of the hamlet, attends satsangs but sings only occasionally, in choruses. He has been married for three years but does not have any children. (I must add that this young man has proved to be a late maturer: thirty years later he is one of the most sensible, and respected, of his adult group.)

Samp Singh has a gift for rhythm, with the drum or with any substitute for a drum. He has a one-room house of his own, in his father's house-yard, in which he sleeps with his wife (a quite inaccessible shy girl, the same age as he, and taller than most); they eat with the rest of Mal Singh's household. Mal Singh himself is one of the senior (in hereditary position) and richer men of the village. He is quiet-spoken, mild-mannered, dark-complexioned, slight. He has a wispy greying beard. He has raised a good crop compared with the others, and has a large herd of goats. He talks little in discussions, and then in a reasonable and conciliatory way. He has a very courteous and charming manner, which can also be seen in all his sons, but especially in the second son, Ghisa Singh.

Ghisa is a boy of eleven, smiling, handsome, good-natured, a friend to everyone. He is the most intelligent of the three brothers but he has not been in school for more than a few days because his father requires him to look after the goats and help in the farm instead. He would like to go to school and learn, but seems too happy by nature to complain. He enjoys our company and our tests, at which he performs more briskly and spontaneously than does Samp Singh.

The youngest brother, Ram Singh, is midway between the other two in intelligence and charm. He is a rather furtive, timid boy of eight or nine and works in the fields. He does not talk much, either in company or when playing. He is lumpish in appearance, and not very bright, but he has enough of the family charm and gentleness of manner to get by.

There is a small girl called Tulsi-bai, who is more timid than the rest of the children of her age (about three or four) and took all of two months to become accustomed to my being near, without becoming panic-stricken.

Moti Singh: Son of Surat Singh, and Family

Moti Singh is a handsome, finely-featured and slightly built youth of twenty-two years. He is friendly both with me and with Amar Singh, and has been a forthcoming informant from the first day of our stay. He has, however, a considerable reserve. He comes out with sudden confidences, then looks at us half-suspiciously, as if to see if we are laughing at him, and defensively laughs at himself first. His actions tend to be abrupt and unexplained: at one time he will show a sudden zeal for all the work of the farm, and summon one of us to watch whatever is going on; at another he will disappear, not speaking to any of us for hours or days.

He made a sudden unannounced trip to the distant city of Indore, at the end of February, in one of his impulsive gestures. The others are used to him, and expect anything of him. He is accorded a measure of seniority among the villagers, by virtue of being a late-born grandson of Sujaji; but he does not speak up in village affairs.

He impresses me as a moderately intelligent, more than usually sensitive and imaginative person. He is a capable but slapdash worker, not the obsessional type. He is subject to mood-swings, and only eighteen months ago experienced a transient psychotic illness (which is described in a later chapter).

Moti's mother is one of the most noteworthy characters of the village. She is small, thin and bent, and suffers from rheumatism and failing eyesight; but she is very active, tough and cheerful. She grazes the goats daily, and also works in the fields when occasion arises. She does not veil her face, is friendly, and talks to us more openly and naturally than any other woman in the village. She is obviously fond of Moti but scolds him for his lackadaisical ways, and grumbles that his head has never been right since he went mad in Ahmedabad nearly two years ago. She seems on good-natured terms with Moti's wife, who remains very shy and ill at ease when speaking to us. She and Moti Singh recently had a quarrel, and he struck her, but his mother intervened in her defence.

Puran Singh and Kesibai

Puran Singh is a cheerful, shy, ratfaced little man in his mid-thirties – slight, bandy-legged, a great talker, fond of jokes. He has lived many years in Ahmedabad; he came home for a month, in February-March 1950, in order to build a house for himself in the same enclosure in which stands his present house which he shares with his brother Kishan Singh. He is smarter and quicker in repartee than the rest of the village, a sophisticated townee, and something of a showoff. At the same time he is so obviously a lightweight character that none of the others take him seriously or pay much heed to what he says. More than one told me he was foolish to start building this house for

he had not enough money. And yet he got it done, and all the wall-building completed; next visit he will put on the roof and the door and it will be habitable.

The house expresses his character. It has innumerable fancy details – shelves, recesses and ledges, all of which he intends for some special purpose. No other house in the village has windows, but this one has three, well-made, small square wooden ones, each with shutters which can be latched.

Like Rup Singh, who has spent many years in the army, Puran Singh both participates in the village traditional and religious rituals and laughs at them. Like Chatar Singh, he has a store of Rajput and Hindu legends, only Puran Singh's are inaccurately remembered – but he confabulates generously to make up the gaps.

It was he, early in his visit to the village, who jokingly suggested that the sahib should serve all the young wives and leave them a legacy of young sahibs to enrich their breed. I remembered this later, when I identified a young woman in a blue-green orni who seemed much less bashful than the rest – who seemed, in fact, to be giving me the eye on every possible occasion. This turned out to be Puran Singh's wife Kesi, a plump, smiling pockmarked girl of about twenty-six years, who flashes her eyes, her teeth, and her generous figure at me. She co-operates coquettishly in our tests, but is so busy making eyes and suggestive remarks that her attention is only fractionally on the test cards. She is the most free in conversation of all the young wives – the only one who has fully accepted city values and city behaviour. She seemed impatient to return to Ahmedabad, in contrast with the majority of wives who have spent some time there with their husbands.

Nathu Singh: Son of Dalla Singh

This is an interesting and somewhat pathetic individual who has spent quite a lot of time with me from the first morning of my stay. I have sometimes found it necessary to cut short my talks with him, because they seem to be dominated by his wish to impress me with his sanctity and his superiority to all his village kinsmen – whereas in fact he is something of a laughing-stock. During one of our first conversations, Nathu Singh told me that he is the *Patel*, or headman of the village; but when I mentioned this to Ham Singh and Pitha Singh, the two oldest inhabitants, they said that this was quite untrue.

He told me that he was the oldest of five brothers and four sisters. The latter are all far from here, in their husbands' villages. Two of his brothers, Wanda Singh and Kump Singh still live in their father's house-yard; but not Nathu Singh. He quarrelled with his father thirteen years ago and has lived apart from the rest of the family ever since. The quarrel, he says, was over religion: his father accused him of devoting too much time to hymn-singing and giving religious instruction to his disciples. Dalla Singh put it much more bluntly, however, saying that Nathu Singh has been too mean to share the

money he earned in the city with the others in the family: as the eldest son it was his duty to help meet the costs of his brothers' and sisters' marriages but he did not do so and that was why they quarrelled.

Nathu Singh has been working on his own since he was ten years old, first as a water-carrier for an English sahib: 'I used to bring him water when he was thirsty.' After three years in this employment he looked after another sahib's cows for four years, and then went to Ahmedabad where he learned about machinery and eventually earned a good salary as a mechanic, in charge of several machines and several men.

It was in Ahmedabad that he became interested in religion, both in the devotional hymn-singing of the bhaktis, who used to sing bhajans together in small informal groups, and also in the instruction given by Gurus. His first Guru, now deceased, was a follower of Ram Devji – a Rajput incarnation of Lord Krishna – about whose miraculous feats many stories and songs circulate in the villages to this day. One of his miracles was to conquer the cannibal demon, Bherawan, in combat. When the demon surrendered and became his servant, he begged only an occasional concession to his need to eat human flesh. Ram Devji promised that each year at the festival held in his name in Pushkar, whenever 100,000 pilgrims have come, the next one will die as a sacrifice to Bherawan – and that happens to this day.

Nathu Singh claims to have been the disciple of worshippers of Vishnu, of Shiva and of the Mahadharm – a secret cult of which he says: 'We have no differences of caste or class. The followers of this belief are all one. We hold that there is one God and we consider ourselves to partake of divinity, not as mere holy men.' He explained that this is a faith in which men and women take part as equals – unlike any other form of Hindu worship – but he always avoided describing the actual practices of the cult, saying that these are secret matters. Other informants, however, told me that it is one of the Tantric rites to perform sexual intercourse between a disciple and his Guru's wife as an act of worship, and that similar acts take place between men and women devotees randomly paired, when they meet for worship in large groups. Nathu Singh claimed to have provided food for three hundred fellow-members of his cult when they assembled in Sujarupa, two years earlier; but there are no other followers of the Mahadharm here, so none of his kinsmen could take part in the secret rituals.

Nathu Singh is pathetically eager to be recognized as a true holy man. He often appears in clean white loincloth, shirt and turban, in striking contrast to the torn and stained apparel of most men of the village, and takes every opportunity to expound narratives from the sacred Hindu *shastras*, when groups are gathered together – but he is not taken seriously, and has no followers among his own kin. He is a regular attender at sessions of bhajan-singing but does not play an instrument, nor does he ever lead the group in song. He also cultivates a reputation for being the possessor of some powerful charms (*mantars*) which he has perfected by repeating them

thousands of times while sitting far into the night at the burning-ghat, surrounded by spirits of the dead. Many informants believe that some of his mantars take the form of sorcery, designed to kill people, not to come to their aid. I have seen him sitting alone, late at night, not near the cremation ground but beside the shrine of Hanuman where any passerby can see him and wonder whether he is 'ripening' a protective or a baleful charm.

Others in the village are quick to point out that his conduct is not what one expects of an authentic holy man – especially his stubborn, protracted quarrel with his father and mother. It is also generally recognized that in spite of all the efforts he has put into learning about religion, his vanity and self-centredness prevent his being accepted as a true bhagat, one who has renounced self and attachment to material possessions. In terms of knowledge, he is the best-versed Hindu in the village; but in personality and performance he is judged by his fellow-villagers and found wanting.

Pitha Singh

This handsome, upright grey-bearded old man was not readily approachable during the early weeks. His manner seemed abrupt, and he was short-tempered, often raising his voice in anger. However, I soon found that his bark was worse than his bite. He liked to tease.

At first, however, I was more conscious of his quick temper than of his sense of humour. During the series of discussions among heads of households about the gifts to be exchanged at the forthcoming weddings of Moti Singh, Gazi Singh and Dau Singh, I heard him speak very forcefully, as if he were quarrelling with the rest of the group; but in time I realized that this was only his mannerism, to which his kinsmen were quite accustomed. When I first took up residence in the *paul* I heard him grumbling loudly about my bad manners because I was wearing shoes in my new living-room (village etiquette required that shoes should be discarded on crossing the threshold). I apologized for my mistake and asked him to correct me if I made any similar mistakes while still learning the customs of the country. A few days later, during one of the discussions about gift-exchanges, he took exception to my being allowed to make a contribution of a few rupees, on the very practical grounds that such gifts have to be reciprocated – and how can they expect to be present at my eventual wedding, if it takes place in England? Some weeks later, at Moti Singh's wedding, he questioned whether I, a foreigner, should be a guest on such an occasion, but he was overruled.

At the beginning of the festival of Holi, on the second day of March, 1950, I heard him protesting indignantly because the younger men in Sujarupa planned to hold the stick dance (called *Gher*) here in the hamlet instead of in Lakhaguda where other Rawats from surrounding villages could take part. He was only pacified when they assured him that they would dance in Lakhaguda on the following evening, and that they would send word to all

the neighbouring hamlets, inviting them to join this evening's dance in Sujarupa. In due course I saw him take part, dancing briskly but with great dignity.

Gradually, the gruffness of his manner became less marked (or I became more accustomed to it) and his mischievous sense of humour became more evident. He liked to ask me about the strange manners and customs of the British, expressing lively scorn about many of these – particularly about our habit of cleansing ourselves with paper after defecating instead of cleansing ourselves with water as all Indians do. (He knew, as did everyone in the village, that I conformed to their toilet habits, disappearing into the adjacent jungle carrying a lotah of water when the need arose, because village males are not shy about their natural functions.) He also jokingly deplored the brazenness with which European women went about with their faces and arms uncovered.

It seemed to please him that I was not put out by his gruff manner and that his favourite grandchild, a four-year-old called Bhur Singh, had adopted me as a friendly uncle. For whatever reason, by the end of two months he was much more forthcoming and liked to tell me stories about his forefathers. As one of the oldest members of the village panchayat his opinions were listened to politely, but seldom accepted because his irritability would often override calm judgement. However, he had wit enough to notice when the consensus of opinion was going against him, and to endorse it as though it was his idea. In this way, the group was saved the embarrassment of having to overrule one of its oldest members.

I heard, in due course, about a number of occasions in the past when his temper had led him into trouble; but he seemed to be mellowing with age. When a severe crisis hit the village, over the killing of the supposed witch Dhapu, he was able to play a moderating and conciliatory role.

Latecomers: Umibai, Mol Singh, Dhapubai and Hira Singh

Four other persons deserve to be included among my principal informants, although their names began to feature in my notebooks only during the last five to six weeks of my stay. The first of these was Umibai, a thrice-widowed woman of about forty. She was married to Karam Singh at the age of thirteen, but two years later was seriously ill with smallpox, which left her both pockmarked and blind. She brought up three daughters, although, as she put it, 'I never saw their faces.'

Her husband was inconsiderate, indeed quite brutal, and finally sent her back to her parents on the grounds that she did not work hard enough in the fields. After his death she married, in succession, two widowers, neither of whom lived very long. She lives alone in a small house and subsists on measures of grain which Nol Singh, Nathu/Inder and Himat Singh are supposed to provide, because they have inherited her first husband's fields.

In spite of her infirmities Umi is an active, interested person; a good informant about some of the quarrels which lie beneath the seemingly tranquil surface of everyday life in Sujarupa.

Mol Singh

I had spoken with Mol Singh, a man in his middle thirties, on a number of occasions, often in the company of Devi Singh because they were good friends, but we got to know each other better only after we had walked in the company of three or four other people from Sujarupa, to attend a late-night ceremony at the shrine of the demon-god Danaji whose Bhopa became possessed by this god's spirit. The shrine was about nine miles walk from Sujarupa, in sparse jungle country three miles north-east of Todgarh. On the way, we passed a young man from Todgarh, in an advanced state of drunkenness, staggering and falling while he shouted: 'I am very drunk: but I must see the Danaji.'

This prompted Mol Singh to tell me that the Bhopa himself had been a severe alcoholic. About three years earlier, while making his way home past the long-disused shrine of Danaji, he had a succession of visions, during his drunken stupors. The god appeared to him and demanded that he become his worshipper. When this happened for the third time he surrendered and ever since then he has been giving offerings to the god and becoming possessed by his spirit on Sunday evenings. The god has acquired a great reputation as a healer, during this time, not least in Sujarupa. Mol Singh himself is tonight going to present his year-old son Kim Singh who was rescued from a serious illness (witch-inflicted) nearly one year earlier: the god is pleased when those he has helped return to express their gratitude.

Mol Singh, like Devi Singh, believes firmly in local superstitions. He has a fund of dramatic stories about encounters with ghosts, but is unwilling to talk about witches, clearly believing that they are more dangerous, and should not be discussed lightly. Unlike Devi Singh he is not given to temple-worship, nor to participation in bhajan-singing, nor does he abjure either strong drink or meat. Still, he claims to be godfearing. As he puts it, 'a farmer's work in the fields is itself his form of prayer'.

Like Devi Singh, he was quite a ladies' man in his youth but claims to have renounced promiscuous sex for the past four years, on two grounds: first, that such conduct results in his fellows' losing respect for him and ignoring his contributions to discussion in the village panchayat, and second, that he shares the local belief that intemperate sexual activity physically weakens a man although it makes a woman stronger.

Mol Singh also resembles Devi Singh in that they both have an earthy sense of humour and like to laugh out loud. This is not a common attribute in their community; most young Rawats pass from giggling adolescence to a rather straightlaced demeanour in early adult life.

He had a difficult childhood, because his mother died while he was quite young and his stepmother ran away to live with another man. This led to a prolonged dispute which ended only when the man in question offered his father three hundred rupees in settlement of the issue. (This prompted Amta Singh to remark: 'It would cost more than that to settle such a quarrel now: fields, grain and women have all become dear.') Shortly before I left Sujarupa, it was Mol Singh who drew my attention to the fact that the first downpour of this year's monsoon had come early, before the end of May and the next had followed in the first week of June – just as the Bhopa of Devji had foretold, on 24 January, 1950.

Like other informants who had seen life in Ahmedabad or in army service he liked to narrate his experiences. He was, for example, greatly impressed by the physical fitness and strength of some American soldiers whom he had met, of whom he said: 'The Americans are the strongest in the world now. They have everything – aeroplanes and everything. And they eat well, that is why they are strong and healthy.'

He seemed to recognize, more clearly than his fellows, that the Rawats' claim to be Rajputs is repudiated by the members of other castes; but his practical conclusion was that if he were to join the army again he would state his name as Mol Singh, Chauhan Rajput, and make no mention of being a Rawat.

He did not hesitate to challenge me at times just as he likes to tease Devi Singh. One day, when I expressed surprise at hearing that Devi Singh sometimes illtreated his wife, saying that he always seemed such a peace-loving individual, Mol Singh replied: 'How can you know what we are like? You see us going about and listen to what we say – but you don't know what we are like inside. A man can sing bhajans and talk piously but only God (pointing upwards) knows what a man is really like.'

Shortly before the end of my stay, after listening to some other people describing their dreams, he declined an invitation to do the same. In a style of response with which I was already familiar, he said that he never had dreams, and almost immediately added: 'Dreams are full of lies; but when I dream it is only about the rain coming, and good crops.' He once again refused to recount his dreams saying: 'There's this much freedom still – our nights are our own!'

In deference to Mol Singh's conservatism about women's behaviour, his wife seldom talked with me. When she did so on one occasion it was to tell me, in her own words, how their child Kim Singh's life had been saved by the Danaji.

Dhapu and Her Son Hira Singh

Hira Singh was among the first heads of households whom I knew by name. He was a regular ex-soldier having had five years' wartime service in Iraq

during which he had learned to read, completed courses on truck engine maintenance and on elementary first-aid, and become familiar with many of the Hindu religious legends. He was counted among the most devout men in Sujarupa, never missing an evening of bhajan-singing, although he professed to be unable to sing himself. Although always extremely polite, he seldom settled down for a lengthy conversation with me: in this, as in other respects, he seemed to be overshadowed by his loud-voiced mother, Dhapu.

Since my room was very close to those occupied by Dhapu and Hira Singh and his wife and child, I inevitably saw a good deal of their family life. It was evident that Dhapu was seen as quite an important person in this community; often a group of two or three women (usually including blind Umibai) would sit and gossip with her outside her door. Dhapu took a lively interest in my interviews, psychological tests and notebooks. Like others, she expressed concern about what I might be writing down. In the absence of my notebook, however, she seemed pleased to talk to me about village history – not least about her singlehanded struggle to defend Hira Singh's inheritance of his father's and grandfather's fields when some of his relatives threatened to appropriate them, during his absence on military service.

Hira Singh also became more communicative during my last month as the tenant of his former goat-house. He liked to talk about his years in the army, and especially about the good comradeship which prevailed in his unit, regardless of his fellow-soldiers' caste or birthplace. He described two particularly close friendships, with considerable feeling. Hira Singh came across as a quiet, mild-mannered man; indeed he described himself as being a 'cool' person, not easily provoked into anger. Temperamentally, he dislikes the expression of violent emotions of any kind, but when involved in a serious quarrel (as in the disputed inheritance) he showed himself able to speak forcefully, leaving his opponents in no doubt that he would fight to the death if need be, to defend his just claims. His anger in these circumstances was the more impressive because it contrasted so dramatically with his usually placid manner.

Although he has always been a hardworking, conscientious head of his small household, he showed that there were limits to his patience when his hot-tempered mother made unacceptable demands upon him. His refusal to do her bidding angered her so much that in 1945 she ceased to eat food cooked at her daughter-in-law's hearth, and for five years had insisted on eating apart, maintaining a separate kitchen. (It is possible that Hira Singh and his wife may have brought about this separation, because people in this area firmly believe that it is dangerous to share food prepared by a witch: if a woman does so, she may find herself involuntarily recruited to their company.)

Although these were my principal informants in 1950, I also gathered information from many other people, including Prem Chand, my Hindi teacher and translator of local dialects, my cook Amar Singh and numbers of

local visitors from the surrounding area. My most notable visitor was Panna Lal Shrimali, a faculty member from the Vidya Bhavan Teachers' Training College in Udaipur, who stayed for nearly a week, observing the administration of personality tests.

Panna Lal came from a distinguished Brahmin family. His elder brother, Kalu Lal Shrimali, then Director of the Vidya Bhavan, was later to become the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University and Banares University in turn, as well as the national Minister for Education for a number of years. Panna Lal had travelled widely, in India and abroad; but he confessed to me that he had never before experienced anything quite like this. To begin with, he had never met such plain-spoken fellow Hindus as the Rawats of Sujarupa. He was disconcerted by their constant punctuation of their ordinary conversation with coarse sexual epithets (a habit to which my ear had become accustomed) and even more by the total lack of respect which most men of the village showed toward his status as a Brahmin. Pitha Singh, our oldest inhabitant, abused him roundly for besmirching his caste status by sharing my meals – even if they were vegetarian. During his stay he had to put up with a good deal of blunt talk and coarse humour. I greatly admired the unfailing calm with which he met this initial hostility, and finally won their respect as a man who talked with them courteously, and on level terms.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to Prem Chand, the young schoolmaster from Lakhaguda. He was helpful to me in many ways in addition to coaching me in Hindustani and in the local dialect of Magrai. Although himself a member of the Jain community (a sect of Hinduism which has existed for more than 2500 years) he has lived all his life among the Rawats. Being more educated than his neighbours, he found it easier to understand the nature of my work, and he gave me a great deal of information about Rawat history and customs. This was invaluable because, as I soon discovered, his accounts were sometimes fuller and less flattering to the Rawats than those given by the members of that community. He was – and remains – a respected member of the larger village community both in Lakhaguda and in his native village, Togi, where he now lives in retirement. At the time of my arrival he had only a few acquaintances in Sujarupa, but he and Devi Singh became friends because they both enjoyed playing the sitar and singing bhajans, and their friendship has lasted for more than thirty years. It has become an established custom that whenever I visit Sujarupa I also spend at least one night in Togi as his guest.

My time was not, of course, only employed in interviews; much more of it was spent in taking part in village activities, or in watching the adults at their work and the children at play. Gradually, I began to have a sense of some of the major elements in the life of this community. In the next few chapters I describe a number of themes which seemed to be of particular importance in 1950, and shall indicate whether, and in what ways, they have changed during the ensuing thirty-one years.

4

Are the Rawats Rajputs?

During the first weeks of my stay in Sujarupa the Rawats, the predominant community in this area, frequently asserted their claim to be Rajputs, members of the Kshattriya or warrior caste-division which is second in status only to the priestly Brahmins. They introduced themselves as Rawat Rajput, and on a very few occasions as Chauhan Rajput. I assumed that theirs was an impoverished branch of a Rajput clan, now making a living by cultivating their small fields where once they had been soldiers of a Rajput prince. Quite soon, however, I heard a different story, from 'true' Rajputs like Bhagwati Singh, a Thakur or landed nobleman of modest rank, whose guest I was for a night in his fortress home, and from the Rajah of Deogarh (a larger fortress-dominated town some twelve miles from Sujarupa). They quite explicitly denied the Rawats' claim to be Rajputs, a claim which has been growing slowly but steadily from one generation to the next for something like 150 years.

In successive Gazetteers and Reports on the census for Merwara since 1881 the comment has frequently been made that enlistment in a local military battalion has brought former predatory tribespeople into touch with caste Hindus of higher social status. This has led them to adapt their tribal customs to conform with those of the Hindus and in the course of time has prompted a number of tribal and scheduled caste groups (traditionally regarded as untouchable) to advance claims to being of high-caste origin. They do this by discovering (or inventing) legends describing their descent from prominent figures of warrior (Kshattriya), priestly (Brahmin), or merchant (Vaisya) caste, hundreds of years earlier. The Rawats have developed just such a legend, claiming kinship with a medieval Rajput warrior-king of the late twelfth century named Prithviraj Chauhan.

Their claims, however, are contested: for example, Champa Lal, the solitary Brahmin of Lakhaguda village, insisted that the Rawats were, until the last few decades, members of a tribal community of brigands and thieves, called Mers. (The word Mer means simply 'man of the hills'.) Champa Lal said that it was only two generations earlier that the Rawats added Singh to their names. Before that, they had a personal name, to which they would add

their father's personal name – as in Lakhaguda and Sujarupa, denoting in each case the founders of these villages; Lakha, son of Guda, and Suja, son of Rupa respectively.

The schoolmaster whom I employed – when he was available – as my instructor in the local dialect and as my interpreter when I wished to converse with someone who knew little Hindustani (as was the case for most of the women) was a Jain, of merchant caste. He explained to me that for many years the Rawats have been progressively adopting Rajput customs. For example, a few generations ago they used to raid cattle from Hindu villages in the plains, and eat beef, but they have now given up both these practices. They used to summon bhagats, devotees of one or other of the local gods, to officiate at their weddings, but now they call on Brahmins to perform these services.

Widow remarriage is commonly practised by the Rawats, but not by Rajputs. Until the early 1940s it was customary among the Rawats for a younger brother to take his deceased elder brother's widow as an additional wife, but at a large congregation of the clan it was formally decided that this practice would be discontinued. At other caste meetings decisions have been taken to stop the custom of the men wearing heavy silver anklets, and that of the women performing rapid, whirling dances when a wedding was in preparation. The motive in each case was to discard practices which they had shared with low-caste or tribal communities, in order to bring their customs closer to those of the Rajputs. The local drummers called *dholis* (although they aspired to the grander title of *bhat* or keepers of a Rajput's lineage) explained to me that they have been called on to perform at weddings and festivals by members of both higher and lower castes: but it is only for Rawats that they sing legends of their ancestors' heroism in battle – as the bhats have traditionally done for their Rajput masters.

In many respects, therefore, Rawat customs have changed, making them more like those of higher-caste Hindus in general, and Rajputs in particular. Sometimes old customs persist, betraying their true origins: for example, it is part of the Rawats' ritual observances after a death to take a gift of cooked rice to the burning-ghat, two days after the cremation. This is called the *sirauni* and its purpose is to enable the spirit of the dead to take nourishment and then set out on his journey to the afterworld. When I watched this ceremony I observed a detail peculiar to the Rawats: the bearer of the sirauni was escorted to and from the ghat by a kinsman holding a miniature bow and arrow at the ready to warn off any ghosts which might seek to do them harm. They could tell me little about this practice, except that 'it has always been done like that' – as indeed it undoubtedly has, for generations before the Rawats aspired to become high-caste Hindus.

Some of the stories told me by my Rawat friends exalted their former savagery in battle, and others took delight in showing that they refused to be intimidated by Rajput rulers who tried to extract levies from them. One ancestor of Suja/Rupa was claimed to have responded to the Deogarh

Rajah's demand for dues by leaving a derisory offering at his fortress's gate: a thin old cow with one horn and half of its tail cut off. This was both insulting to the Rajah and showed that in the old days the Rawats did not share the Hindus' worship of the cow; yet when the tale was told in 1950, it was followed with delight and its climax greeted with loud laughter – and when I heard the tale retold in 1981, its reception was equally gleeful.

Other stories were told (but always by non-Rawats) concerning the low-caste nature of their former customs. One such was the repeated reference to their sacrifice of the head of a firstborn son, to appease the goddess Piplaj Mata at her temple on the outskirts of Todgarh. An old drummer called Duda Dholi elaborated this legend still further by saying that once upon a time a young Rawat boy who had been designated as the victim asked only to be allowed to play the *dhol*, or big bass drum, once more before being decapitated. At this the goddess intervened, speaking through the officiating Bhopa: 'From this day the sacrifice of an eldest son will cease, and I shall let this young one go.' All present dholis, said Duda, are descended from that boy.

Another grisly custom in which the Rawats used to participate, together with members of the Mina tribe, the Mers and other low-caste groups, was the annual offering to the goddess of a number of buffaloes, each of which was hacked to death piecemeal with swords and axes, instead of being slaughtered in the usual way. It was known, however, that from a certain date (I learned later that it was from 1875) the Rawats renounced participating in this gory ceremony although it continued to be practised by other communities for several more decades. It was impossible, in the field, to tell what relation these legends have to historical events but in July and August, 1981, I was able to find near-contemporary references in the archives of the India Office Library in London. Two sources were especially valuable: the *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* by Colonel James Tod (1837) who took part in the defeat of the Mahratta army which had been pillaging Udaipur and other Rajput States for several years, and the *Sketch of Mairwar* by Lieutenant-Colonel C.G. Dixon (1850). The former secured the acceptance by virtually all the Rajput princes of the treaty of 1817, by which the British left the ruling of their kingdoms in the Maharajahs' hands, subject to the scrutiny of a British Resident, who intervened only when there was a breakdown of equitable rule. This treaty lasted for 130 years, until it was abrogated by the first government of independent India; throughout that period the coinage of the State of Udaipur bore the words *Dosti Landhan* – The Friendship of London.

Both of these officers agreed in describing the inhabitants of the Aravali hills, in the region where the boundaries of Jodhpur, Udaipur and Ajmer-Merwara come close together, as being violent, dedicated to looting the villages of the adjacent plains and not easily subjugated. Armies had been sent to bring them to heel, from Jaipur in 1725, from Udaipur in 1754 and from

Jodhpur in 1778, but so effective was the Mers' guerrilla warfare that these armies had to admit defeat, with heavy losses. Subsequent punitive expeditions from Ajmer in 1800, from the Mahrattas' main army in 1807 and from Udaipur in 1816 were equally unsuccessful. The Mers and their offshoots, the Merats and the Rawats, continued to raid settled villages and to exact Danegeld from any camel caravans which wanted to travel over their terrain.

It was in 1818 that Colonel Tod made a camping tour in the Aravali hills, which were then the haunt of tigers and, as he put it, of 'the equally savage Mair'. He also referred to them as 'the plundering mountain Mair'. He described the Cheetas and the Rawats as subgroups of the Mers who were in turn a branch of the tribal Minas who were found in greater numbers further north, in the state of Jaipur. Tod wrote of these three groups collectively in 1837: 'All these wild races have the vanity to mingle their pedigree with that of their conquerors, though in doing so they stigmatise themselves.'

Tod was referring to the belief shared by many of the Mers, Minas, Cheetas and Rawats that they are descendants of Prithviraj Chauhan, the last member of a Rajput dynasty which ruled over wide territories from their seat in Ajmer for over 500 years, until the defeat of Prithviraj III, at the hands of a Moghul army, in AD 1192. During the reign of the last Chauhan, his son Jodh Lakhun distinguished himself in battle and took as part of his booty a young woman called Sehdev, who claimed to be a Rajput. Some years later he learned that she was really a Mina, and at once banished her from his household, together with their two sons Anhal and Anup. They suffered many hardships, but were helped by a community of Gujars (cowherds). When they were a little older the youths Anhal and Anup received a divine message that they should take wives from any caste in order to perpetuate their line. Anup's descendants settled near Todgarh, assumed the title of Rawat and resented being called hillmen, or Mers. Beside those mentioned above, there are three other tribal groups who have claimed the title Rawat, two of these claiming descent from a Parmar Rajput of Jodhpur State, and the third from a Gehlot Rajput of Chitor. The choice of this title may have been influenced by the fact that it has been used in more than one state as the designation of a ruling prince.

Within two years of his camping tour, Tod was called upon to suppress a fresh outbreak of looting by the Mers. In 1821 a detachment of soldiers from the Indian Army, led by British officers, decisively defeated the principal groups of Mers and organized a policing of the area which ensured a prolonged pacification of this district.

In spite of his high regard for the Rajputs' heroism in many historic battles in the past, Tod was profoundly unimpressed by the failure of the rulers of Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur to have dealt more effectively with the Mers' prolonged defiance of their authority. In a reference to the 1821 campaign he wrote: 'The facility with which we reduced to entire subjection this extensive association of plunderers, for centuries the terror of these countries,

occasioned no little astonishment to our allies. Their resistance was indeed contemptible and afforded a good argument against the powers of those who had tolerated the existence of a gang at once so mischievous and so weak.'

In 1822, Tod established the Merwara Local Battalion which enlisted Mers and Rawats into its ranks. This gave them the experience of a manly yet disciplined service, as an alternative to robbery. From 1824 until near the end of British rule the states of Jodhpur and Udaipur entrusted the control of their hill territories adjacent to Merwara to the British. The task of 'civilizing' this turbulent area was undertaken by Colonel Dixon who was its governor from 1836 to 1857. He saw that the Magra (to give the hilly district its local name) contained many fertile valleys which could yield good crops if there was enough water to irrigate them. He therefore designed dams to create small reservoirs, and lived to see some two hundred of these constructed. His prediction was confirmed: whenever the monsoon was strong enough to fill the lakes the fields gave good harvests and the formerly belligerent Mers became attracted to the farmer's life.

It was at about this time, too, that the Rawats began to have social aspirations. In the report of India's first nationwide census, in 1865, the Mers and Rawats were counted among 'Tribals and Animists' and not as Hindus. By 1881 the census for Merwara included 20,036 Rawats as against 32,946 Mers, but they were both still classified as non-Hindu. In 1921, however, those describing themselves as Mers had shrunk to 14,585, while 53,270 claimed to be Rawats and all of these were now classed as Hindus. In terms of occupation the Mers were now termed 'Forest and Hill Tribes' while the Rawats were termed 'cultivators' – a measure of the success of Colonel Dixon's long-range planning, and of their ascent in the social scale.

The Director of the census of 1931 commented on the steady upward drift of the population's self-description, from Mers to Rawats and then to Hindus. He did not, however, observe any tendency as yet for the Rawats to claim to be Chauhan Rajputs. Even during my stay in Sujarupa in 1950 I very seldom encountered this claim, though only just before I left Mol Singh did tell me that if he decided to enlist in the army for some years, he would sign on not as a Rawat, but as a Chauhan Rajput. Thirty years later the Rawats' open assertion of their descent from Prithviraj Chauhan was gaining ground, especially among the young men, though I encountered only two (Tara Singh and Laxman Singh, both of whom had completed ten years' schooling) who used the appellation Chauhan when they signed a letter – though not in everyday speech.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the decennial exercise of the national census seemed to stimulate underprivileged communities to lay claim to a higher caste status. Many low-caste groups claimed to have recently rediscovered their hidden caste identity. In the state of Bengal alone, during the 1911 census, hundreds of petitions were received from different castes requesting that they be known by new names implying

higher status. In north India the commonest aspiration was to become Rajputs, thus entering the high-ranking Kshattriya (warrior and landowner) caste.

There were, however, instances of caste mobility long before the first Indian census. The anthropologist M. N. Srinivas has pointed out that, contrary to popular belief, an Indian community's traditional calling is not absolutely immutable. From his own fieldwork in Mysore (Srinivas, 1952) he showed that 'a low caste was able, in a generation or two, to rise to a higher position in the hierarchy by Sanskritizing its ritual and Pantheon. In short it took over, as far as possible, the customs, rites and beliefs of the Brahmins. . . . This Sanskritizing includes a ban on eating beef, if not total vegetarianism; more frequent bathing; early marriage and a ban on widow remarriage; seclusion of women; wearing the sacred thread and avoidance of polluting contact with impure people and things. . . . Sanskritization also involves taking new, purer caste names and discovering a more suitable genealogy than what one has actually had.'

Clearly, Srinivas's criteria correspond in many respects to the steps which the Rawats have taken over the years to strengthen their claim to be of Kshattriya status – though they still differ from high-caste Hindus in their acceptance of widow-remarriage. There are interesting parallels between the Rawats' aspirations and those of some members of the Noniya community, a menial (*sudra*) caste of saltmakers and ditchdiggers found in the north Indian states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. William Rowe (1968) has described the social ambitions of an emerging middle-class group in this community over more than a century.

During the years following the Mutiny of 1857 when a great deal of reconstruction work had to be carried out, a number of the Noniyas acted as contractors and builders, and prospered. It was they, and their descendants, who launched the claim that the Noniyas are descended from Chauhan Rajputs. They began to teach their children about the heroic feats in battle of Prithviraj Chauhan and his perfidious defeat by the Moghul Mohammed Gouri. His warriors, fleeing from the Moghuls, were obliged to discard their sacred threads, to take up menial occupations and even to accept food from untouchables in order to conceal their identity as Rajputs, and so save their lives – or so the legend goes.

In 1900 a Rajput Advancement Society was founded to press the Noniyas' claim to be Chauhan Rajputs, but for some years this remained the concern of a small, educated minority of the total community. After the First World War, however, the legend spread more widely and by 1924 the activists decided that it was time for the Noniyas to disclose their true identity as Chauhan Rajputs. A number of public ceremonies took place, at which the Noniyas adopted the sacred thread: but the members of other castes remained unimpressed. Twelve years later similar public assumptions of the sacred thread provoked a vigorous reaction from local Kshattriya landlords who beat them up, tore off

their sacred threads and fined them for their effrontery. A year or two later they resumed wearing the thread, though less ostentatiously, and this time they were left unmolested. Local Brahmins scoffed at their pretensions but were willing (for a consideration) to officiate at their domestic ceremonies as if they really were Rajputs.

The Noniyas' experience has differed from that of the Rawats in that it has been inspired by a small middle-class elite who are eager to improve their social status. When Rowe carried out research in their community in 1959 he found that few of the very old men wore the thread, but more of the middle-aged did. Among young adults a decreasing number did so, because they had worked in cities where class rather than caste was the real measure of social rank.

Another factor has also entered the picture in that the successive governments of India since Independence have exercised positive discrimination in education, employment and development projects in favour of the impoverished tribals and scheduled castes: there has thus been a political and economic incentive for members of these groups to maintain their old identity in order to take advantage of the privileges now being offered to them.

The Noniyas are only one among a number of tribal and scheduled caste communities who have been deliberating whether or not to abandon their traditional customs and beliefs in the hope of being accepted as caste Hindus. David Mandelbaum (1955, 1960) has observed this taking place among the Kotas of the Nilgiri Hills. In his later, comprehensive survey, *Society in India* (1970), he recalled his own observations and cited a number of later studies of tribal peoples undergoing a difficult transition towards acceptance as Hindus. These studies have described the process among the Konds of Orissa (Bailey, 1960), the Bhumij of Orissa and West Bengal (Sinha, 1959), the Bhotias of Uttar Pradesh (Srivastava, 1962), and the Santals of Bihar (Orans, 1965). In each of these communities there has been a cleavage of opinion between those who urged that they should abandon many of their tribal customs, while others wished to hold fast to these customs – and incidentally benefit by the Indian government's programme intended to help tribals and members of the scheduled castes.

During my three-month stay among the Bhils of south-western Udaipur, in early 1952, I was able to observe a section of this warlike tribe who were, at that time, quite determined not to relinquish their tribal ways. They still marauded villages of the plains, and waylaid travellers, unless they were paid to provide protection against their fellow Bhils. In fact, their behaviour was very similar to that of the Rawats about a hundred years earlier.

The Rawats, however, want simply to invest themselves with something of the prestige which attends every Rajput lineage, but especially that of the great Prithviraj. Although most of them live in comparative poverty, they cherish the Rajput flavour which is given to their celebrations of birth and marriage, and the major Hindu religious holy days by the presence of a

drummer to herald their approach, and a bhat to recite a list of their ancestors and to sing about their prowess in battle. If this is a fiction, it is at least harmless, and at best fortifies the morale of a people who have to work hard in order to maintain a spartan existence in a beautiful but rugged – and often arid – terrain.

5

Gods, Ghosts and Magical Powers

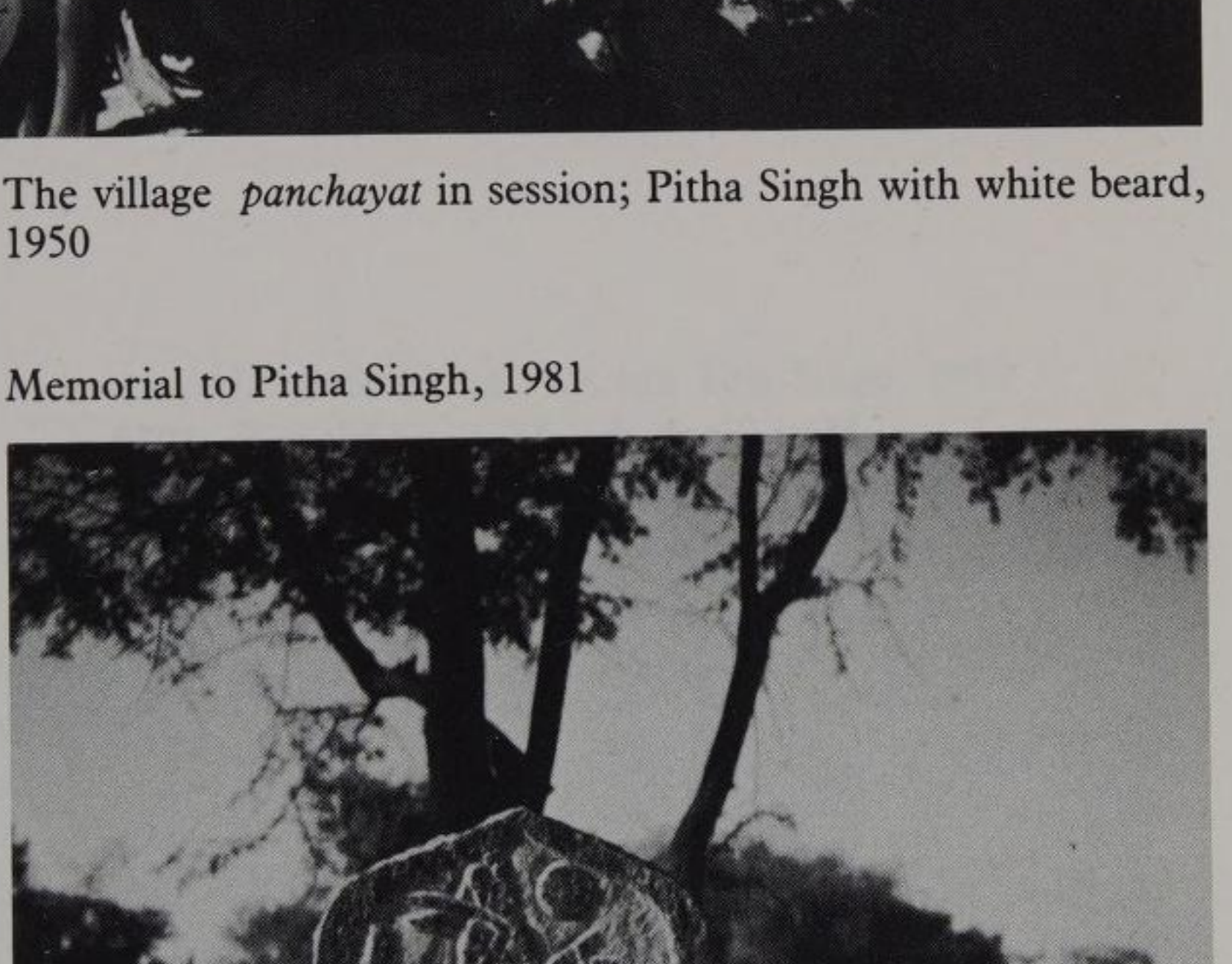
It took some weeks, if not months, before I fully realized how important a part was played in the villagers' lives by supernatural beings and magical powers. The approach to Sujarupa from the road was the site of a number of small altars, one of which boasted a stone relief carving of a mounted man: this was the *chauki* or memorial to Suja Singh, the founder of the village. Other altars carried plain, unsculpted stones which bore traces of red paint or coloured silver paper, the fading marks of past worship. They were irregularly spaced and at first sight seemed neglected, but in fact they were well remembered and were paid homage on special occasions. They included stones consecrated to Hanuman the monkey-god, to Sitala-mata the goddess of smallpox, Ganga-mata the goddess of the Ganges and by extension of any lifegiving source of water. Each of these had a subsidiary stone representing their Bheruji, or heavenly servant. A larger shrine dedicated to Vishnu, a rectangular stone hut containing a number of images, stood apart on the slope of the hill, to the north of the village perimeter. A little further up the slope a level patch of ground contained three up-ended stones, sometimes freshly whitewashed: one of these was for Maungarji, a deified Rajput warrior of long ago, together with two stones for his Bherujis.

In the course of time I learned that each of the regularly used jungle paths converging on Sujarupa from different directions was protected by a deity; but the occasions for paying homage to these deities were widely spaced (one of them was a young bride's appeal to each one of them in turn to bless her with many children, when she left home to take up residence in her husband's village) and sometimes it was quite difficult to pick out the consecrated stone from other boulders lying beside the path.

Inside the village, there was a shrine to the Mother-goddess (Mataji) who appears in many forms: this one was called Chauth-mata and she was formally worshipped on the fourth day of each half of the lunar month. In addition, every house had one or two small brass images or framed paintings which were worshipped daily. These usually included a representation of Lord Ganesh, the elephant-headed son of Lord Shiva, whose help would be invoked at the start of each day's work, and the next most common household

The village *panchayat* in session; Pitha Singh with white beard, 1950

Memorial to Pitha Singh, 1981



Approach to Sujarupa, 1950

Moti Singh the elder and his wife, 1950

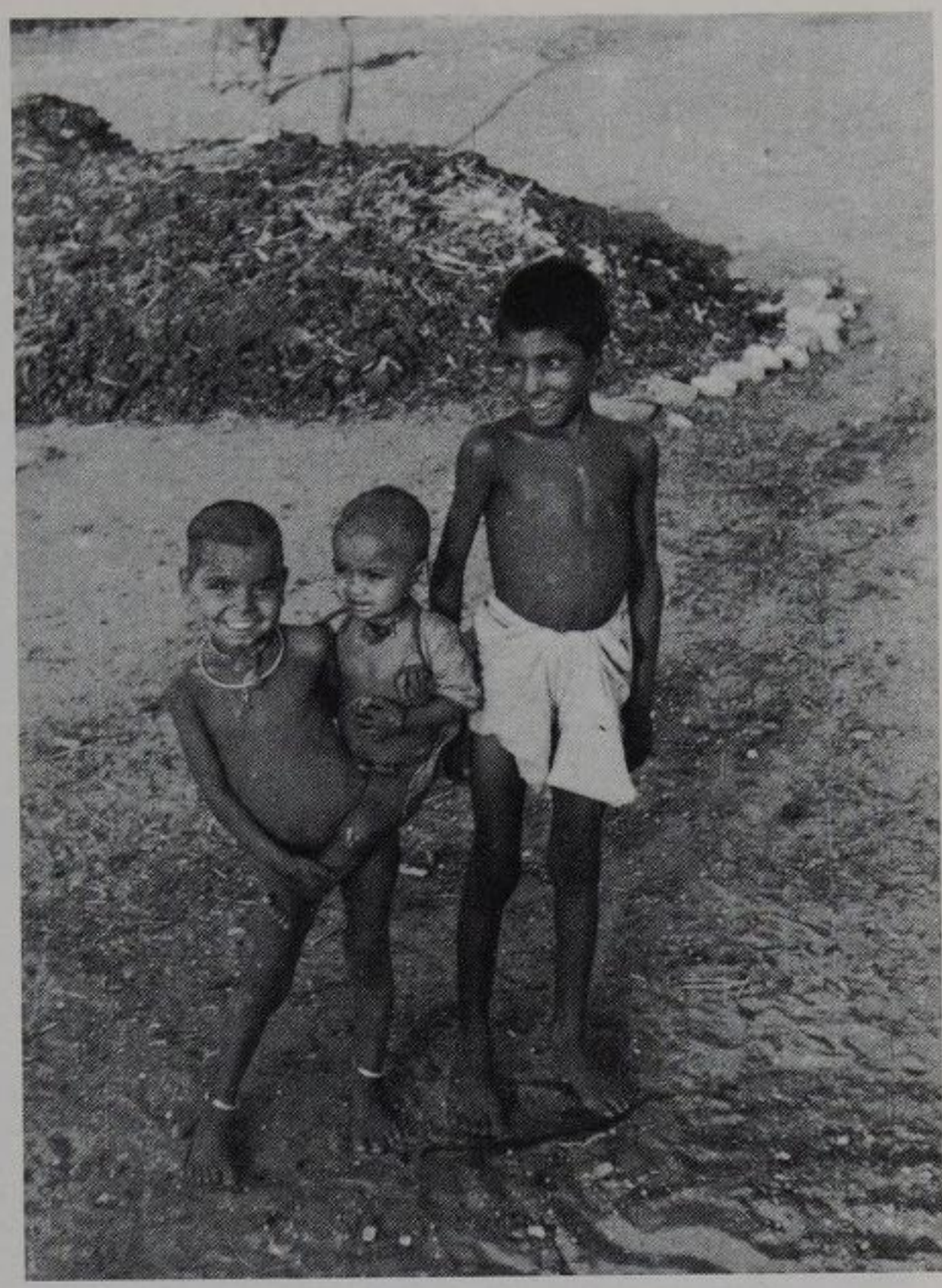
A married woman observes purdah while carrying water, 1950

Himat Singh and his son Teja Singh, 1950

Above: The *sirauni*, an offering to the spirit of the deceased, 1950.

Right: Hira Singh, his wife and his mother Dhapu, the supposed witch, 1950

Dakhu and her mother, wife of Hama Singh, 1950



Older sister carries the baby, 1950

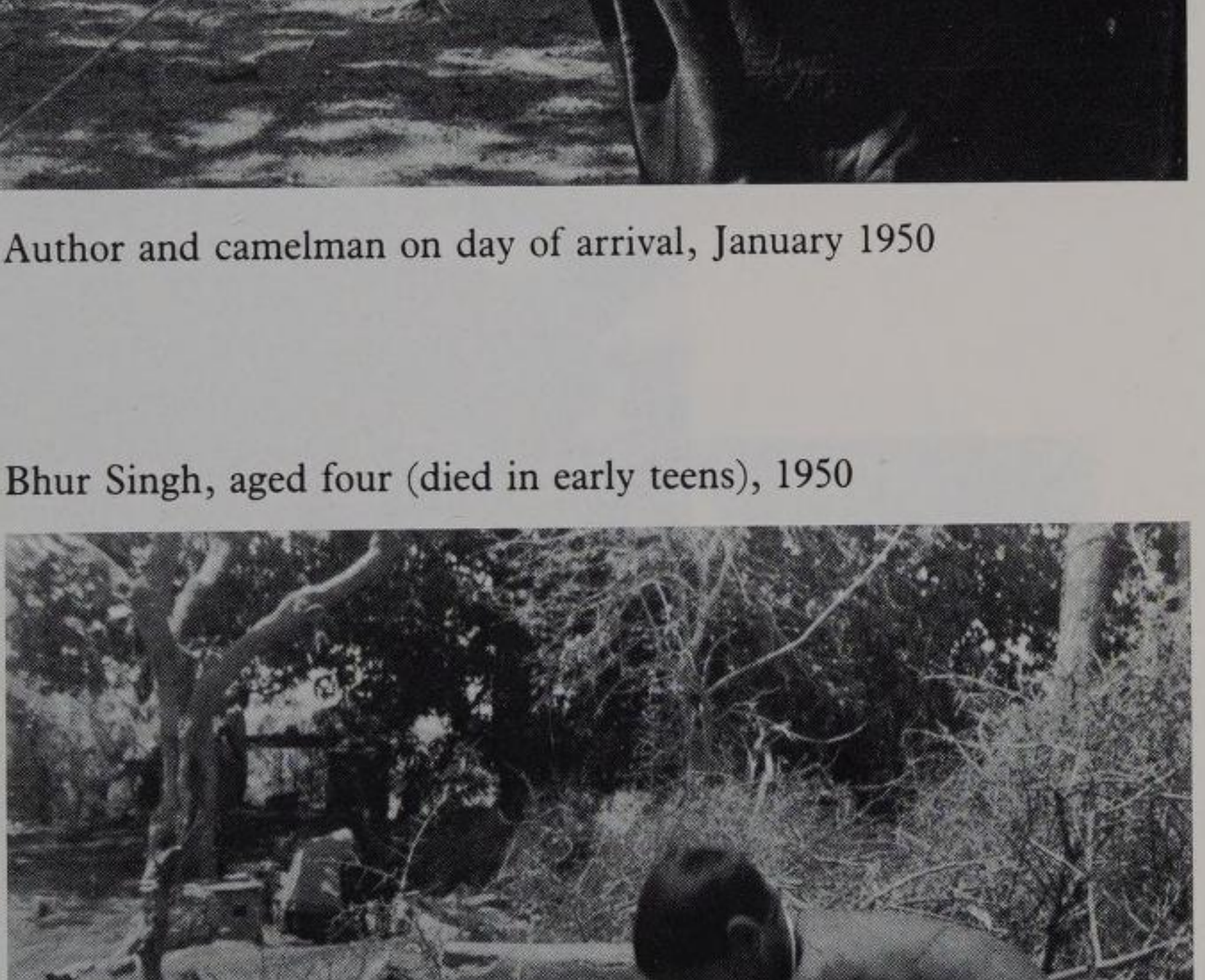
Hira Singh and his wife returning from working at his well, 1950

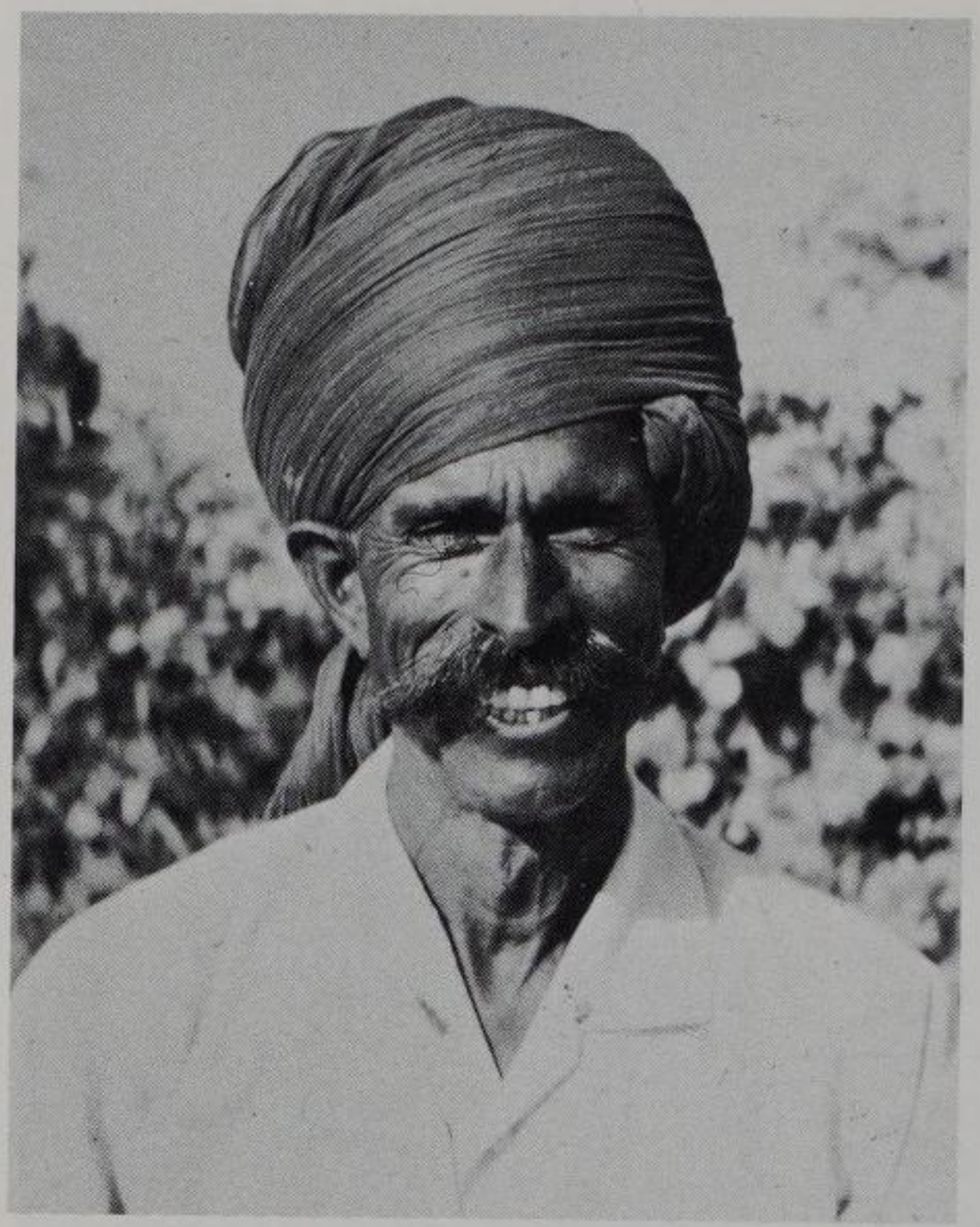
Devi Singh's first bicycle, 1950

Pitha Singh's feet are bathed and massaged as befits the senior guest, 1950

Author and camelman on day of arrival, January 1950

Bhur Singh, aged four (died in early teens), 1950

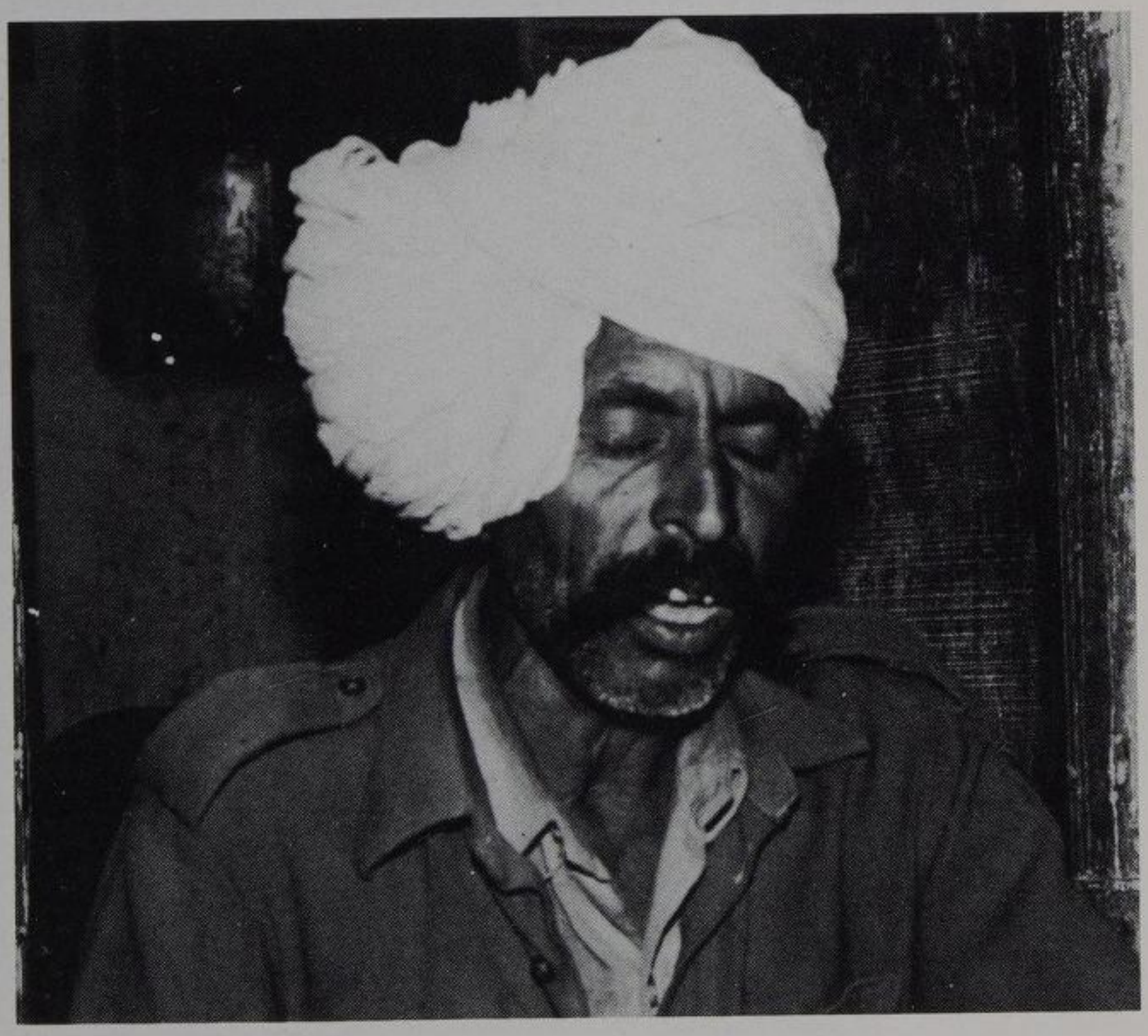


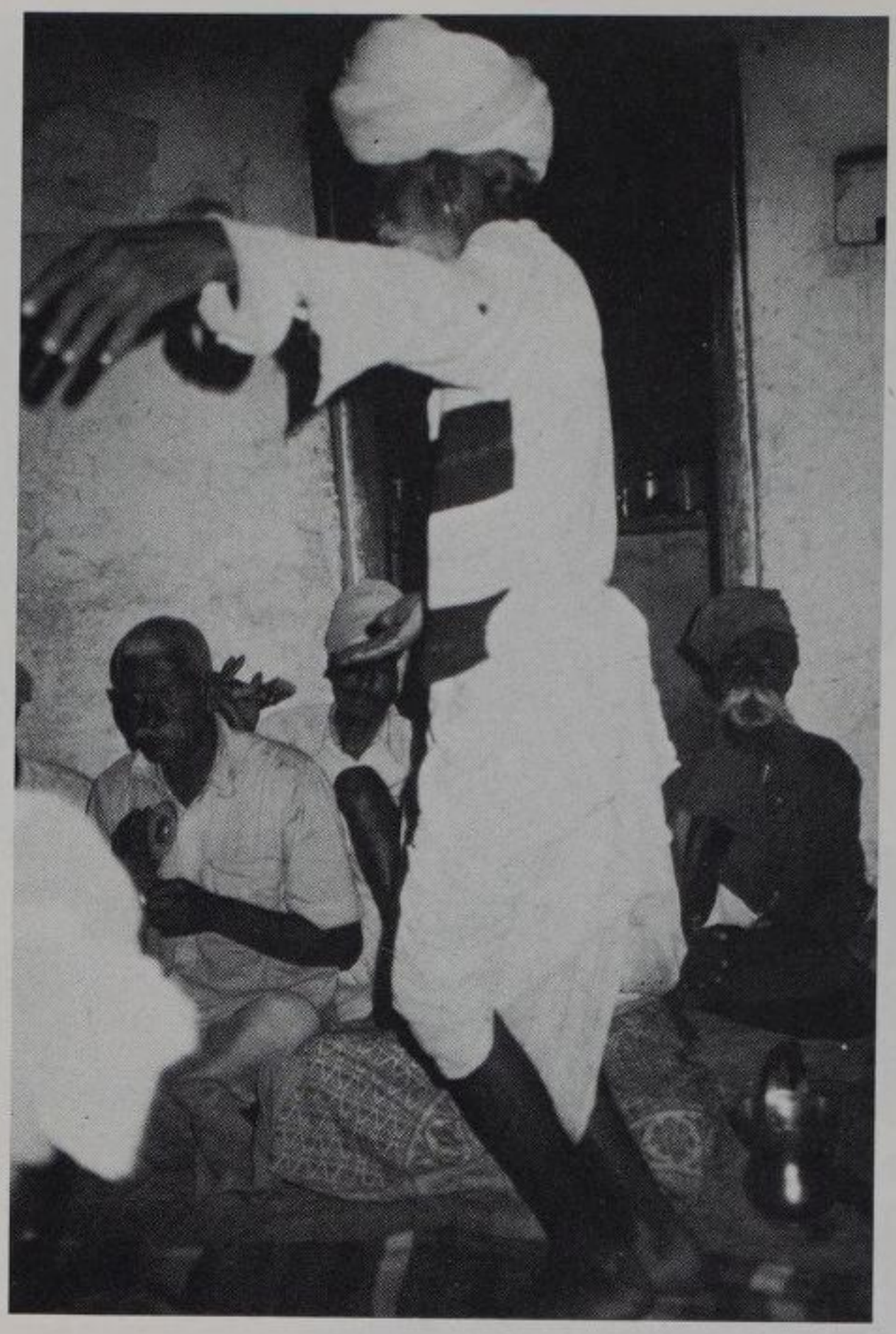


Left: Rupa Singa, 1964.
Below: Rupa Singh, 1981

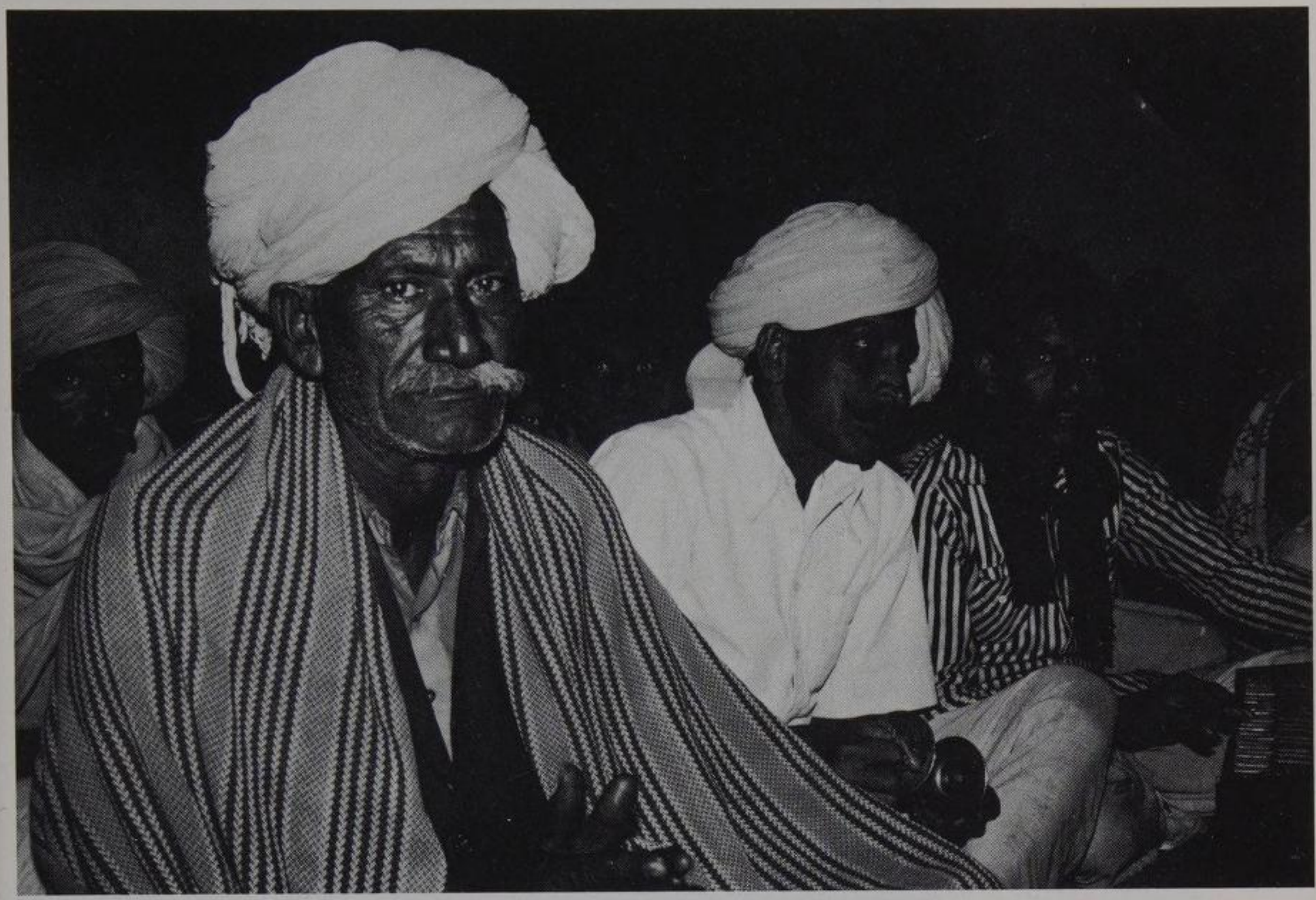
Nathu Singh, 1981

Samp Singh leading a bhajan, 1980





Left: One of the elders dances during bhajan session, 1981. *Below:* Samp Singh, Teja Singh and Tara Singh making music, 1980



Devi Singh and Samp Singh at bhajans, 1981

Author and Devi Singh, 1981

Right: The Holi pole, 1950.

Below: A youngster grazing goats in early morning, 1950

god was a legendary Rajput incarnation of Lord Krishna, called Ram Devji.

The Great Gods of the Hindu pantheon were worshipped with due solemnity on their several holy days – that is to say, there always seemed to be someone who remembered to perform this service, though the majority of the villagers needed to be reminded about such occasions. In general, these Great Gods were perceived as being powerful, but remote, unconcerned about the everyday problems of village life – the exception being Sitala-mata. If an epidemic of smallpox broke out, then she was assiduously worshipped, sometimes treated to cool water dripped upon her effigy when she was thought to be suffering from an excess of heat during the days of high summer. She was given offerings of cooling foods such as sweetmeats made from milk and sugar in the hope that this would please the goddess and persuade her to stop the epidemic.

The anthropologist David Mandelbaum has drawn a distinction between two levels of religious observance in Indian villages, which he terms Transcendental and Pragmatic. The former is concerned with paying due homage to the Great Gods – Shiva, Vishnu and Mataji the Mother-goddess, in all their different manifestations – and the latter with the lesser, local deities which differ from place to place. The Great Gods are perceived as being remote, and rarely involved in the villagers' daily lives; but it is nevertheless important for the welfare of the whole community that their worship be observed because failure to do so would invoke their wrath. The lesser gods, on the other hand, still dwell in the local area and are much involved in everyday events. It is to them that the villager turns for help in times of sickness or other forms of trouble.

Such a division does indeed exist, but it is typically Hindu in that the distinction is not clearcut. For example, the goddess Sitala-mata will be worshipped on her special holy day – the eighth day of the first half of Chaitr month when winter ceases and summer begins. All over northern India groups of women can be seen, in towns and villages, going to worship Sitala-mata at sunrise on this day. This is an important propitiatory measure to ensure that the goddess knows that the community pays her due homage. In March, 1981, I happened to be travelling, early that morning, through the Merwara countryside and saw several of these processions.

This was an example of Transcendental worship; but if actual cases of smallpox were to appear – as they had not done in the last few years – the same goddess would have been beseeched to help these villagers in their affliction, in an outpouring of Pragmatic devotion.

It was interesting to reflect that these women, singing songs of praise to Sitala-mata, were convinced that their act of piety would help to protect their village from smallpox, while the World Health Organization was congratulating itself and its member countries on the final success of their campaign to eradicate smallpox from the entire human race. Already, five years had passed since the last reported case of smallpox in any country. It will be interesting to

observe, in future years, whether this worship will continue in its present form, or whether the goddess will acquire a different role.

The village has a great many lesser gods, including at least a dozen Bherujis, and ancestor-spirits such as Maungarji and Ajitpal. The memorial to Sujaji, the ancestor who founded Sujarupa, is also paid homage, especially after a good harvest; but there are four local gods to whom, in 1950, the villagers turned chiefly when they felt in urgent need of help, namely the shrine of Devji the snake-god; the temple of Piplaj-mata in Todgarh and that of Ram Devji, some three miles' walk on jungle paths to the south-east of Sujarupa, and (most popular of all) the shrine of the demon-god Danaji in the jungle north-west of Todgarh.

What these shrines had in common was their priests' ability to become possessed by the spirit of the god, and thus imbued with power to heal sicknesses and help their supplicants out of practical difficulties. It was impressive, and comforting, to be able to talk, through the medium of the priest in trance, with the very deity in person; and the deity always promised that all would turn out well.

These were the common sources of help, but they were greatly outnumbered by a variety of supernatural entities which could cause harm. Chief among these were *bhut-parhet* (ghosts), *churel* (the ghosts of young women who died in childbirth), *dakan* (female witches) and *jadu-phoonk* (malign sorcery). Most of the Bhopas were able to detect these harmful powers while they were in trance; some of them, and a few others who had undergone training with an older exorcist, could also divine what spirit was at work by feeling the victim's pulse (or, to be exact, by feeling the tremor of his finger-tendons, at the wrist). The priest or exorcist would then prescribe what action must be taken, and what offerings made, in order to defeat the evil spirit.

Ghosts were very often invoked as the agents of sickness or accident. Many villagers, old and young, told me about attacks of fever or sickness which had been so caused, and from which they were helped to recover by a bhopa or an exorcist. During the later weeks of my stay, I quite often found myself called upon to treat a patient who was at the same time being treated supernaturally. Indeed, several bhopas and exorcists were themselves my patients, and they were kind enough to initiate me into the technique of determining whether a ghost, a witch, or harmful sorcery was at work.

Several of my informants told me about their encounters with ghosts. Quite often these occurred at night, when they were walking home: some had heard animal-like cries, which they recognized as coming from a ghost. Mol Singh once was followed by a ghost which appeared as a dancing flame, and then as a small child calling 'Wait for me'. He prayed fervently to Ram Devji for help and was rewarded by seeing a vision of the god on horseback, riding to his rescue.

In general, ghosts are the spirits of relatively young men, who have died

before their prime. They haunt the scene of their death, if it was due to accident or violence; if they died of disease, they haunt the cremation ground. They are jealous of their survivors, and can easily be provoked into doing them harm. For example, Moti Surat fell ill while working at a cotton-mill in Ahmedabad. This happened in the summer of 1948, eighteen months before we first met. For three days he suffered severe headache and fever which was not relieved by two injections given to him by a doctor, and after this he suddenly became quite psychotic, talking incoherently and striking his room-mates for no reason. He became so violent that he had to be admitted to the city madhouse for ten days, after which Devi Singh brought him back to Sujarupa by train and on foot, with his arms tied with ropes. He remained severely disturbed for three months, during which time he was led, still with his arms bound, to Danaji's shrine, whose Bhopa told him that the illness was due to his having passed water at the spot where a man had been killed in a road accident, and it was the ghost of this man who must be propitiated. This was done, and the madness gradually left him.

Quite young boys, like Deva Regar aged thirteen and Panna Singh aged twelve, could recall occasions when they were feverish, and a ghost was found to be the cause. Nearly every child was believed, at one time or another, to be invaded by a ghost or by sorcery: this was so common an event that they could be treated at home by heating a piece of iron, or the stem of an earthenware pipe, in the fire and then branding the child with one or two short transverse lines, on the upper abdomen, in order to expel the spirit. Almost everyone bore the marks of this remedy, called *rakha.* Older people when afflicted with pain in the chest or abdomen would also be treated by the application of rakha.

Ghost afflictions were so widespread that many, if not most, people had suffered (and survived) on one or more occasions. Perhaps on this account, ghost stories were told frequently, and young people even vied with each other in claiming not to be afraid of ghosts. Some of the older men, especially those who were ostentatiously pious, like Nathu Singh and Hira Singh, insisted that those who constantly remembered the name of God are impervious to being harmed by ghosts – and yet even they would describe encounters with ghosts in the past.

Encounters with a churel (who could be recognized at once because her feet were turned backwards) were a much more serious matter, because their resentment at being cut off when they were enjoying sex and looking forward to rearing children was so great that they were set upon killing their victims, whether male or female. I learned that there was only one way for a man to escape their clutches, and this was that he should suddenly divest himself of his loincloth and rush at the churel as if to rape her, at which she would run for her life, and disappear. Laxman Singh described having escaped in this way, when followed along the road from Lakhaguda one night by a seductress he recognized to be a churel.

A very recent experience of being attacked by a churel was given to me by Moti/Hama only three weeks before the end of my stay in 1950. His young wife had fallen sick, four days earlier, and when they consulted Udha Singh, a stonemason from Lakhaguda who also is a renowned exorcist, he felt her wrist and pronounced a churel to be the cause of her illness. She was told to prepare an offering of wheat flour, sugar and butter and to leave this beside a village path at night. She did so, and quickly recovered.

If these female ghosts are feared, the same is true in greater degree of witches. In the chapter describing the death of Dhapu I have mentioned the remarkable similarity of the magical practices attributed to female witches in medieval Europe and to their counterparts in north India to this day. In both cultures witches are perceived as a group apart, as sociable devils who like to congregate at midnight in cemeteries or cremation-grounds, riding naked on the backs of wolves (in Europe) or hyenas (in Rajasthan). They also like to recruit younger women to join their covens, sometimes entrapping them with a show of hospitality; but most girls are forewarned by their grandmothers that they must never share a meal with a strange woman, however ingratiating she may be, because if they eat from the same dish as a witch they will find themselves involuntarily turning into witches, with no hope of escape.

Indian witches are still believed to practise a magical form of cannibalism. In this part of India, whenever an adult or a child succumbs to a wasting disease, the onlookers believe that a witch is somehow drinking her victim's blood and devouring his or her liver. Not surprisingly the dakan is greatly feared – and hated. I noticed that in the vocabulary of really offensive swearwords the ultimate abuse would be to accuse one's adversary of being *dakani rand ka putr* (son of a prostitute witch). At this stage the exchange of vituperation was liable to turn into an exchange of blows unless onlookers stepped in to separate the furious disputants. In contrast, neither bhuts nor churels carried associations of obscenity, although the latter were known to be hungry for sex, and both were capable of killing their fellows who had the good fortune still to be alive. Both of these apparitions were feared, though not with the same intensity as were witches.

The list of supernatural powers which impinge on the villagers' daily lives is not complete without mentioning magic, sorcery and charms which ordinary people can learn, perfect and then use either to help or to injure their fellow-men. One form of such mischief is the evil eye, the product of jealousy. In Sujarupa, as all over India, mothers of small children are often anxious in case their child will fall sick because a childless woman, or someone with a grudge against its family, has looked at it with evil intent. Various precautions are taken to protect the child, such as the use of *khol* (a black cosmetic paste, applied like eye-liner) or tying a coloured thread, or a *tabiz* (a tiny silver capsule containing a written charm) round the baby's upper arm. A larger tabiz is often worn by grown men and women as a protection against hurtful magic.

One hears frequently about jadu-phoonk, the practice of malignant sorcery aimed at a particular victim. Some individuals are known to be the possessors of harmful, even death-dealing magic which can only be undone by the employment of a stronger, protective spell. Black magic of this kind can be applied without the victim being aware of it, but when he or she falls sick, a priest or a magical healer can interpret the cause of the illness. Sometimes, however, harmful magic is employed openly: Umibai told me about a recent dream in which she had not yet lost her sight. She and Karam Singh, her first husband, were working in their field when they saw that his brother's wife had moved its boundary stone. They quarrelled with her about this, and in a rage this sister-in-law shouted at her. 'May all your family die!', and also: 'Your child, soon you won't see his face any more.' The child fell sick with fever, that very night, and died on the eighth day.

Most of this kind of magic depends upon someone having acquired a mantar, or secret charm; but the charm does not become potent unless it is 'cooked' by being silently repeated some thousands of times, late at night, either at a god-shrine or at the cremation-ground which is haunted by evil spirits. It takes great courage to sit alone in such a place, even though one is protected from the ghosts by drawing on the ground a *kar*, or magic circle, which they cannot enter.

Many people know one or two healing charms. On one occasion I saw Devi Singh employ such a mantar in order to cure one of his goats which had eaten some poisonous berries. At other times I saw one or other of our celebrated *mantar-janne-wale* (knowers of charms) whisper a charm inaudibly and then blow towards the face of his patient. Unfortunately, a healing charm will only prevail if it is more powerful than the harmful one, and whether this is the case is seldom immediately apparent, so anxious parents may go from one healer to another, with their sick child, unless a powerful spirit like that of Danaji or Ram-Devji tells them firmly that his power will prevail and that they must not consult anyone else.

Whenever things go wrong unexpectedly, or an illness suddenly strikes, villagers are convinced that one of the above supernatural forces is at work and they lose no time in consulting someone who can tell, by divination, what is the supernatural cause, and what must be done to set things right.

Sometimes people are given intimations of warning, in the form of omens, that they are heading for trouble. Such omens include a partridge calling from the right, a donkey braying, a *millalli* or a *chama* (two small dark birds) calling on the left, a woman with an empty pot, or one carrying firewood, or a widow or a snake crossing one's path from right to left, or thunder on the first day of any month. A prudent man will stop and postpone any undertaking to a more propitious time if he encounters one of these omens when setting out to do some task. Here again one is given a sense of the surrounding presence of unseen supernatural powers, not merely on special occasions, but all the time.

6

Family Support and Family Quarrels

Because Sujarupa was founded as recently as 1880 by a single pioneer from Lakhaguda, it was possible to draw up a genealogical table including all the male descendants of Sujaji, the founding father (see Appendix 2). I was surprised, both in 1950 and again thirty years later, at the confidence with which young men as well as the elders could recall the details of this family tree. One reason was, no doubt, the prompting of the dholi, who frequently recited the chain of ancestors of each male adult. Another reason was the importance of lineage in supporting a man's claim to his inherited plots of land.

In contrast, even my best male informants could not confidently remember the names, nor even the number, of female children born in the earlier generations. When we came to complete our census in July, 1980, my helper Laxman Singh could tell me how many young girls were still living in their parents' house, or which married daughter was here on a visit – but he could not always recall their names. On the other hand the women of the household, and even quite young girls, when consulted, could immediately give us the name of every living 'sister', whether she was here on a visit or far off, in her husband's village.

The contrast between careful recording of male family members and comparative neglect of the female members reflects an economic reality. Once a young woman has married and left home she effectively leaves her parental family and becomes a member of her husband's extended family. Male members of a lineage have a lifelong financial responsibility towards their father and mother, and their brothers – and for certain purposes, such as weddings, towards their sisters and cousin-brothers also – but the only lasting obligations of the women are towards their husbands, their children and (at a more symbolic than substantial level) their brothers.

Because I had arrived some two months before the most popular season for marriages I was soon able to observe several meetings of the village panchayat, in which all the adult men took part. They were concerned with the arrangements for a series of weddings to be celebrated in the early spring – those of Moti Singh, Dau Singh and Gazi Singh in their respective spouse's

villages, and that of Dhaku (Moti Singh's sister) here in Sujarupa. There was lively discussion about the level of hospitality to be demanded of the host village, and about the gifts of clothing to be exchanged. Not only the bride and groom, but also their first-degree relatives expect to receive new clothes from the 'other side'. Relatives of different degrees of closeness are expected to contribute to these exchanges as well as to be their beneficiaries. There was often quite spirited discussion before agreement was reached, and the relative's contribution duly recorded in a ledger by one of the few literate men in the village, or by the *Rao* (the Rawats' professional recordkeeper) from Lakhaguda.

Members of the extended family were actively involved in the exchange of visits at which the *sagai* or engagement ceremony was performed, and some preliminary gifts handed over to the respective parents. To an onlooker, it seemed that every stage in these exchanges was watched jealously in order to ensure that each party to the bargain was paying his due share. When the propitious date and hour for the wedding drew near, the bridegroom was accompanied to his bride's village by the *barat,* an escort of male members of his extended family. In early March, 1950, I accompanied Moti Singh's barat, which surrounded him when he mounted a white mare for his arrival at Togi village, after a twenty-mile walk. We were hospitably greeted, and rugs were spread on the ground for us to sit and rest, while boys brought water to bathe our feet and then treat our legs to a soothing massage. The first act of the wedding ceremony proper took place late in the evening, when the bridegroom and his escort made a mock assault on the bride's house. He struck the *toran,* an emblematic wooden shield hung over the doorway of the house-yard, with his sword, and then we all went in to take part in the final exchange of gifts, the marriage ceremony and the first of a series of banquets in which the main item was a wheat-flour pudding (*rabli*) enriched with quantities of brown sugar and clarified butter.

Here, as so often in Rawat ceremonial, there appeared to be a mixture of Rajput and tribal customs: the latter was again apparent on the third and last day of the celebrations, when the barat re-formed and enacted a mock abduction of the bride before setting out with her (and one or two of her brothers) on the long walk to Sujarupa.

Weddings were one occasion for a public demonstration of each nuclear family's reliance on the support of their network of relatives. Another such occasion was observed – all too often – in the support given to a bereaved household during the twelve days following a death in the family. No fire should be lit in the hearth at this time, so the women of other families brought them cooked food, and shared in the womenfolks' wailing, while the men sat in the yard, gossiping and incidentally showing that they shared in their brothers' grief: this is termed 'the sitting'.

In principle, therefore, all the households of the village were one large family; in practice, however, true family feeling was strongest among full

brothers, falling away sharply among cousins of increasing degrees of separateness. Even though all the men regarded each other as 'brothers', of a sort, there were quite a number of instances of quarrels between cousin-brothers, and even between fathers and their adult sons.

One such quarrel, that between Nathu Singh and his father Dalla Singh, was of long standing. It had come to a head thirteen years earlier, when Nathu Singh returned to the village after working in distant cities for many years, having had to fend for himself since the age of ten. According to Nathu Singh's account, his father had resented his devoting so much of his time to religion, and especially criticized him for wasting money on feeding fellow-worshippers when there were gatherings for hymn-singing; and this had led to his leaving his father's household and building a house of his own.

His father put it very differently. He said that Nathu Singh, his eldest son, should have contributed to the expenses not only of his own marriage, but to those of his four brothers – but he had not contributed a penny. He also reproached him for filial impiety – during recent months both Dalla Singh and his wife had been seriously ill, but Nathu Singh had neither visited them nor offered any help.

Whatever may have been the true grounds of their falling-out, they were both stubbornly resentful towards each other, and neither seemed willing to make any move towards a reconciliation – nor did they, as long as Dalla Singh lived.

Some village men seemed to be particularly belligerent. One of these was Chatar Singh, a blustering aggressive individual who was quick to anger if he did not have things his own way. He too had a long-standing feud on his hands, because he had fallen out with his wife, the mother of his three sons, and had taken a second wife in *natha* (the Rawats' name for a second marriage, often with a widow, which is usually entered into in order to ensure male offspring). His first wife was a spirited woman, who refused to be discarded – and, as a mother of sons, she had the support of the extended family. She occupied one room in the household, and the second wife another, but she still frequently quarrelled with her husband. One evening, while I was talking with Moti/Surat we heard voices raised in anger. Moti Singh smiled and said: 'Bheruji khelta hai' – meaning 'They're possessed by the spirit of Bheruji,' a god who can be provoked to anger, if not served with due respect.

Karam Singh, the first husband of blind Umibai was another very quarrelsome man. Even though Umi bore him three children, he was angry because they were all girls, and finally sent her back to her parents. Not long after this he became very sick and tried to become reconciled with his three nephews, Nathu Singh, Himat Singh and Mol Singh with whom he had been on bad terms. They accepted his overtures, because he was believed to have secretly buried a large sum of money somewhere in his house – but even on his deathbed he would not reveal where. This information was given to me by

Umibai, who went on to say that after Karam Singh's death his nephew Nathu Singh dug holes in the floor of his house, but would never reveal whether he had found any cache of money.

I was surprised to learn that my friend Devi Singh's small extended family, consisting of his widowed mother Premi, his older brother Gomin Singh and his wife Kesi, and Devi Singh's own wife Dakhu had not always been on friendly terms. According to my informant Mol Singh, the cause of their quarrel, in 1947, was the familiar one: a dispute over the partition of their father's fields. Usually, Devi Singh's mother tended to favour him, but on this occasion she supported Gomin Singh, her elder son. The quarrel led to the division of their formerly united household. Premi lived and ate her meals in Gomin Singh's house, and for a whole year the two households did not speak to each other. Last year, at the time of the spring harvest, Gomin Singh and Premi were cutting wheat in one of their fields, and while they were doing so, some of Chatar Singh's cattle broke into their field and ate part of their crop. This led to a protracted quarrel, in which Nathu/Asa (the brother of Chatar Singh) also joined. He lost his temper, and struck Premi twice with his axe, so that she bled profusely.

Devi Singh heard about this only in the evening, when most of the village had gathered in the *paul* to decide what should be done about it. The consensus was that the police should not be informed, but the village panch should decide what amends should be made to Premi; but when Devi Singh saw how badly his mother had been injured, he would have none of this and insisted on cycling to the nearest police post, in the village of Bagar, and reporting the assault to the officer in charge. Some days passed before that officer came to investigate. By this time, however, the panchayat had instructed Nathu Singh to give Premi twenty-five rupees as compensation, and told both parties to make an end of their quarrel. So the charge of assault was dropped, and since that time Gomin Singh, Devi Singh and Premi, as well as the two daughters-in-law, have been speaking to each other again.

In general, outbursts of anger and aggression are strongly deplored in the village. Efforts are made to effect a reconciliation as quickly as possible – but some quarrels like that between Nathu/Dalla and his father have proved intractable. Another quarrel of great severity was one between the widow Dhapu and her son Hira Singh on the one hand, and Pitha Singh, Raja Singh and Nathu/Asa on the other. This was a dispute over the inheritance of land. It was prompted by envy. Pitha Singh, Raja Singh and Nathu/Asa each had three sons who would eventually claim equal shares of their fields; but Hira Singh was going to inherit a one-sixth share of Suja/Rupa's lands, which had remained undivided for two generations.

What made this more galling for them was the fact that Hira Singh's father Pancha Singh was an adopted son. They thought it unfair that an adopted son should be able to pass on to his own son the best inheritance in the village. To complicate matters further, Pancha Singh had already died, while Hira Singh

was serving in the army in Iraq; and Hira Singh's grandfather, Dungar Singh, was old and frail. Pitha Singh and his two companions decided to take part of this legacy by force; they contended that they had every right to do so, because Dungar Singh had not obtained the consent of all five of his brothers before taking Pancha Singh into adoption – and this was a violation of Rawat rules of conduct.

They discussed the matter extensively with other heads of households, of whom only Himat Singh, and the ex-soldier Nol Singh condemned their plan, so they plotted to seize certain of Dungar Singh's fields as soon as he expired; but they bargained without Dhapu. She warned Dungar Singh about what was afoot and went with him to Bhim where they had legal documents prepared, confirming the adoption of Pancha Singh and Hira Singh's right to be the sole inheritor of his grandfather's fields.

The conspirators were furious when they learned about these legal documents. When Dungar Singh died, they planned to hold a funeral feast in his honour, and then divide up his property; and they also threatened to drive Dhapu out of the village, but she spoke back to them like a true Rajput warrior's wife, saying she had only one life but she would gladly sacrifice it rather than allow them to steal her son's inheritance. Six months passed before Hira Singh obtained leave to return home from Iraq. When he did so, his first act was to hold a funeral feast for his grandfather (which the plotters had not yet done) and then he confronted them personally, promising that if they tried to seize his fields he would fight to the death with his sword and take at least one of them with him.

The scene of contention now shifted to the village panchayat. Hira Singh was held responsible for his grandfather's having bypassed the panchayat in drawing up the disposition of his properties and for over a year he and his two supporters were formally excluded from the panchayat and denied any intercourse with the rest of the community. Within three months Himat Singh found the strain of this excommunication unbearable and became quite psychotic. After a year had passed, Hira Singh approached the panchayat in session, removed his turban and placed it upside down in front of where he sat; this gesture meant that he acknowledged having done wrong, and begged to be readmitted into the community. He and his supporters were granted pardon, and Himat Singh's madness lifted within a few weeks; but nobody ventured to take away any of Hira Singh's fields.

Hira Singh is not, and never has been, a violent man. He was glad to be on speaking terms with his kinsmen again; but his mother Dhapu was not so tolerant. For the rest of her life she harboured strong resentment against Pitha Singh, Raja Singh and Nathu/Asa and their descendants. When a marriage took place in any of these families she pointedly left Sujarupa and visited with one of her own family of origin until the wedding was over. It seems probable that her stubborn refusal to be reconciled with her enemies was at least partly responsible for her quarrel with Hira Singh and her

withdrawal from his hearth during the last five years of her life.

One has to remember that during all this period of strife Dhapu was secretly believed to be the village witch: and that of the three men who were charged with her manslaughter one was Raja Singh, the ex-plotter, and another his son Nim (or Niba) Singh.

The reason for Dhapu's having been considered to be a witch and made the scapegoat of the village may well have been her having acted in such a manly fashion throughout the dispute over her son's legacy. This was resented because her strength of character and her warrior-like behaviour were seen as unbecoming in a woman – and doubly so because she was an incomer by marriage into the extended kinship of Sujarupa.

In general, co-operation of all members of a joint family in the work of the fields was the norm, until the head of the household (usually by this time a grandfather) died, when one or more of the brothers might elect to live apart, and cultivate their fields separately. There were, however, instances of quarrels between brothers and even – as in the case of Nathu Singh and his father Dalla Singh – between a father and son. Sustained co-operation became more difficult to achieve when it involved fellow-citizens of Sujarupa who were not close kin – although alike in all being descendants of Suja/Rupa. This was aggravated by the fact that the heads of households were very distrustful of any of their number who tried to assert leadership.

In 1950, Chatar Singh, the son of Asa Singh, was a would-be leader, but the rest were unwilling to follow. For example, not far from the village there was a small reservoir whose dam had been broken some six years earlier after a torrential rainfall. There had been repeated discussion in the panchayat about making an appeal to the government officer in Bhim for a subsidy to help them repair the dam; but this required joint action by all the senior men, which Chatar Singh was unable to obtain – there were always one or two who grumbled that the reservoir would help others, but not themselves, and who refused to sign the petition or promise a contribution of money or labourers towards its completion. In 1981, the dam was still in a derelict state. Chatar Singh was, however, able to organize his kinsmen in May of 1950 when he drew up lists of men and women who wished to participate in the government-organized relief work which resulted in the rebuilding of a larger dam near Lakhaguda. He liked to think of himself as the spokesman for his village, but his kinsmen did not take him seriously.

In 1981, I observed that electricity had reached Lakhaguda, and that the power lines passed within a few hundred yards of Sujarupa. When I asked whether this village could hope to be included, I was told that this had been discussed repeatedly in the panchayat, for several years. In 1980, at the prompting of Rupa Singh, the necessary total of thirty heads of household had signed a petition to this effect, promising to make a contribution of fifty rupees each towards the cost of the installation. Soon afterwards, however, two of the signatories withdrew their support, and the project lapsed. Rupa

Singh complained bitterly about how difficult it was to overcome his fellow villagers' mutual distrust, and about their reluctance to be involved in a co-operative undertaking.

There was no lack of intelligent, hardworking men in the village, as could be seen by the marked improvement in their crops and the building of new, *pakka* (strongly built) houses: but these were all single-family initiatives. That there was a virtual taboo on individual leadership was brought home to me on the late afternoon of 21 March, 1981, the eve of Holi. Sujarupa, like other hamlets, had erected its Holi-pole four weeks earlier, but it needed repair before it could serve as a bonfire – and nobody seemed willing to take the lead by calling for helpers. Somehow, at the last moment, one or two households offered the necessary rope and bundles of dried grass, and in a great hurry the job was done and the bonfire duly took place.

I talked with Laxman Singh, during the belated preparations, and he confirmed that generally nobody wished to tell other people in the village what they should do, when a joint task had to be undertaken: this would be seen as a form of personal aggrandizement and held against the would-be organizer. The paradox remains that there are many activities – in addition to weddings and funerals – in which co-operation would benefit the whole community; but their distrust of the motives of anyone aspiring to leadership has virtually restricted leadership to within the joint family. The one exception to this rule is leadership in organizing gatherings for bhajan-singing, for which Devi Singh has not only acquired a modest personal reputation as a bhagat but has also succeeded in putting Sujarupa's name on the map – which certainly was not the case in 1950. Thus service to one's family and the worship of God are two areas in which personal leadership is rewarded with esteem.

This impediment to co-operation in joint enterprises is by no means peculiar to Sujarupa, nor to Rajasthan. Anthropologists and community development workers have reported, from every quarter of India, a tendency towards factionalism and distrust of leaders (including village panchayat chairmen) which often obstructs needed changes. Clearly, some critical monitoring of joint undertakings is desirable, indeed necessary, if only as a protection of the common interest; but until it becomes possible for able men to be entrusted with leadership roles in a wider arena than that of the joint family, badly needed improvements which would enhance the quality of life in the villages will continue to be unnecessarily delayed.

7

Changes, and Resistance to Change

One of the principal changes in the village has been the adoption of new agricultural techniques which have improved both the crop yields and the villagers' diet. In 1950, every household in Sujarupa owned some fields and everyone, without exception, was employed at least part-time on farming work. From the age of six or seven, boys and girls would spend long hours in the scrub jungle grazing the family's goats, and old men and women who could no longer do heavy work in the fields also took their turn as goatherds. A daily task was that of drawing water from the well for domestic use, and also in order to irrigate the fields – or in many cases the jealously watched sub-divisions of fields which had been parcelled out among several inheritors. In this Rawat community a deceased father's fields are divided equally among his sons, whereas among the Rajputs primogeniture is the rule: the eldest son inherits the whole of his father's property and at his discretion he may donate a small share (perhaps not more than 10 per cent of the estate) to his younger brothers. The latter either become subsistence farmers or else venture out into the world to earn their living.

Fields vary considerably in the richness of their soil, and in their accessibility to irrigation, which determines the type of crop they can carry. In 1950, the principal crops were wheat, barley and pulses in the *rabi* (winter) and maize and millet in the *kharif* (summer) sowings. Red chillies were also cultivated, dried and stored for domestic use, as were onions; the growing of onions, garlic and green vegetables such as spinach, cabbages or okra, were, however, considered to be the work of an inferior caste, the *malis* or market gardeners, and so were left to them to cultivate.

The Rawats' customary diet was extremely monotonous. At both the morning and the evening meal this consisted chiefly of *roti* (pancakes of wheat, millet or maize flour) accompanied by a small helping of curried lentils or by some homemade mango pickle to give the roti more flavour. Fresh vegetables were an infrequent luxury and most families ate little or no meat, a few on religious grounds but the majority of necessity because they could not afford it.

There are no chickens in these Rawat villages, and eggs are not eaten. In

earlier times their diet included hares, wild boar and game birds, but the only meat I saw served in 1950 was the flesh of goats which had been sacrificed to a god, a goddess or a witch – and that happened only infrequently. The old men complained that the increase in population and overgrazing in the surrounding jungle had greatly reduced the amount of game in recent years. They grumbled about the younger generation who had become too pious to enjoy meat and country liquor, as they had done in their youth.

Up to 1981, the implements for work in the fields had hardly changed at all. Ploughing was still done with wooden ploughs drawn by two bullocks; some of these ploughs were strengthened by an iron point attached to the tip of the ploughshare. These and other traditional pieces of equipment, such as the bullocks' yoke, the leather bag, ropes and pulley which were used to draw water from the well, and the earthenware pots for carrying and storing water, were all made by hand in Sujarupa or in its neighbouring hamlets. The corn was cut at harvest-time with a small hand sickle, trampled by the feet of blindfolded oxen circling round a post set in the middle of the open-air threshing floor, and then winnowed in the wind. These techniques, as well as the instruments employed, seemed to have remained unchanged for hundreds of years. The same could be said of the domestic butter-churns and the heavy grindstones whose abrasive noise, in a score of homes, marked the beginning of each day as women ground wheat or corn for the family's bread.

These things had not changed – perhaps because no better tools had been discovered. Sometimes, however, the villagers clung to old ways out of sheer prejudice. In the census report for 1931 it was observed that Merwara villagers were most reluctant to try new farming techniques, or new strains of seed corn. Even in the 1980s they still are too poor, and their fields too small, to think of employing tractors, mechanical harvesters, threshing machines or tubewells with power-driven pumps – all of which are now common in farms in the Punjab, the wheat-bowl of India.

Nevertheless, some significant changes have occurred since 1950. Early in the decade of the 1970s news reached the village about new strains of wheat and corn which gave a much greater yield on shorter, stronger stalks. Information about them was spread by government agricultural development agents, who travelled from village to village explaining the advantages of these new strains and urging people to try them, and see the difference for themselves. This advice was followed by one or two households in Sujarupa, at the start, and their harvests demonstrated dramatically how much the yield of their fields could be increased. Within a year or two, everyone wanted to try the new grains. It was now that they became aware that simply to plant these seeds was not enough; the fields needed to be well watered, and fed with fertilizer in order to realize their full potential. Advice about these new procedures was given in early morning radio talks for farmers. (Until 1967, when I brought a transistor set as a gift for Devi Singh, there had been no radio in Sujarupa; now there are thirteen.)

My stay in 1950 had been long enough for me to see the rabi crop ripen and be harvested; but that year's was a meagre harvest because of the drought. I used to walk in the fields, noting the great contrast between those which were irrigated and those which had been planted after early winter showers, only to wither when no more rain fell. More than one person said: 'You should come back another year, when we have good rains – then you will see a proper harvest.'

During the next twenty years, when news reached me from the village it was often concerned with their crops, which fluctuated according to whether the monsoon rains had been generous or sparse. In 1973, when I paid a short visit during the rainy season, there was still no talk of the new seed grains which had been in use in the Punjab for almost a decade; but from 1975 onwards I began to hear about a series of exceptionally good harvests. It was only in the summers of 1979 and 1980 and the spring of 1981 that I was able to see for myself the scale of the improvement.

Even in 1981 there were a few farmers who, because of poverty or incompetence, had not been able fully to exploit the new varieties of seed grains – and their fields contrasted pitifully with those of their neighbours. Several heads of households told me that the ripening harvest of wheat this year represented a fourfold increase in yield as compared with that of their former crops, even in years of good rains.

In 1981, as in 1950, I was invited by several villagers (including Moti/Surat, Gomin Singh, Ghisa Singh and Rupa Singh) to view their fields. In addition to the evident increase in yields I was impressed by the greater diversity of things grown for domestic consumption. Gomin Singh was especially proud of his developing orchard of papaya, lime, banana and mango trees; others had planted turmeric and garlic, spring onions, okra and a clover-like fodder for their cattle. Another plant which I had not seen growing in 1950 was mendi, a bush whose leaves yield henna, a brownish-orange dye used to beautify women's hands and feet and to colour hair. Clearly, the Rawats had overcome their former prejudice against growing fresh vegetables, which they had regarded as malis' work.

Another useful plant was now growing in profusion near the Well of Flowers; this was a stand of *cannabis indica* (hashish) whose leaves and resinous pollen were gathered by Sri Prem Giri, an emaciated, saffron-clad holy man. He has taken up residence by the roadside shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, and devotes part of each day to preparing infusions from the leaves (called *bhang*) or pipefuls of tobacco mixed with cannabis resin (*charas*). He likes to regale callers at the shrine with a drink of bhang or a smoke of charas when they pause to worship the god and stay to gossip at the sitting-place. (One has to remember that cannabis is highly regarded locally as an aid to meditation and devotional worship and not as a drug.)

The recent succession of good harvests has brought some modest indications of prosperity. In 1950, for example, Devi Singh's bicycle was the only

one in the village; by 1980, there were fifteen. Not only had radios increased in number, the pattern of their use in the village was quite different from that in towns. There, the radio has become a public nuisance because in almost every marketplace there are loudspeakers raucously amplifying an unending stream of vulgarized music from popular movies. In Sujarupa, because batteries are dear and have to be purchased in bazaars seven or more miles distant, the radio is turned on sparingly. Two programmes are the most popular: one is the news for farmers, the other the singing of bhajans, broadcast daily from Jodhpur, Udaipur and Jaipur. The singers are sometimes city-bred professionals, but more often they are village people, like their audience in Sujarupa who listen attentively, occasionally criticizing the performance, but usually with appreciation. In contrast, they are unmoved by 'filmi' songs, and only one or two persons take the trouble to listen to the news; but the early morning talks for farmers are followed regularly and are discussed when groups of men chat.

The content of the villagers' gossip has changed, showing a much greater interest in events elsewhere in India, and even in remote countries like Japan, Germany, America and Australia. In marked contrast, I remembered a conversation I had had in April, 1950, with an elderly, blind blacksmith called Ram Lal. He had suffered from acute lobar pneumonia, which had rapidly improved in response to a course of sulphonamide. On the third day of his treatment I found him sitting up trying to work at his anvil. I urged him to rest for a few more days, and stayed to talk with him. He asked me: 'Doctor Sahib, is it true what they are saying that the British people have left Delhi?' I said: 'Yes, Grandad, it is true: the British rule ended three years ago.'

Ram Lal thought for some moments, before saying: 'Then I suppose the Moghuls are back?'

Clearly, he found it easier to believe in British or Moghul rule than in India's newfound independence.

In 1980 and 1981 when I talked with older citizens about what they considered the most noteworthy changes in the village they nearly always commented on the increase in communications. Now, eight buses pass daily along the village road, where before there were none. People travel further, and more frequently, and there is much more talk about distant places. The villagers' horizons have been widened, certainly, but with their heightened awareness of the immensity of India has come a chastening recognition that Sujarupa, Lakhaguda and their neighbouring villages are not so important as local people used to believe.

Another indication of a recent increase in prosperity is seen in the number of pakka. These are still built of stone but use cement in place of mud and have flat roofs constructed with long stone slabs and surrounded by a low parapet. Here, the family can take the air (or, as they say in Hindi, 'eat the air') in the cool of the evening and sleep under the stars during the long hot weather. Devi Singh was the first to complete a pakka house, in 1964;

by 1981 there were eleven, with two others under construction.

In several families the initiative and the money required for this task were provided by men who had spent some years working as factory hands in the cotton-mills in Ahmedabad, some 250 miles away. These mills have attracted young men from Sujarupa for the past fifty years. In 1950 there were four villagers – Devi Singh, Gomin Singh, Nathu/Dalla and Moti/Surat – who had returned to the village after spending from two to nine years in factory work. There were six others who were still at work in Ahmedabad, coming home once a year on vacation. In addition, there were three ex-soldiers among the heads of household: Nol Singh, Hira Singh and the older Nathu Singh. Four others were still in military service.

By 1981, the persons had changed, but the number of young men who worked elsewhere had not increased significantly. There was a difference, however, in that they did not all go to the cotton-mills of Ahmedabad, several being employed in small industrial enterprises in Rajasthan itself. In 1980 there was a departure from a long-standing tradition of military service in that one young man, Laxman Singh, had elected to enlist in the Indian Navy and was currently stationed at a naval base in Bombay.

During the past thirty-one years there has been a modest increase in literacy, but only among the men. In 1950, only one-third of the boys in Sujarupa had any schooling at all. Among those who went to school, Nol Singh's twelve-year-old son, Panna Singh, was the first to continue his studies beyond five years. His father was ambitious for him to study through senior secondary school, if not further; but, unhappily, Panna Singh died of dysentery at the age of sixteen, before these ambitions could be realized.

Sujarupa was backward in terms of literacy, when compared with Rajasthan as a whole which had a literacy rate, in 1951, of 14 per cent for males and 3 per cent for females. Rajasthan has remained one of the regions of India with the lowest record for education. In 1971, the latest year for which detailed figures were available at the time of writing, only two out of thirty-one states and union territories had a lower literacy rate than Rajasthan. Throughout the country, women were at a severe disadvantage as compared to men, with the notable exception of Kerala, which had the best record of any state not only for overall literacy but also for having lessened the wide discrepancy between literacy rates for men and women, and between urban and rural dwellers (*see* Table 1).

In 1980 it had become the rule and no longer (as in 1950) the exception, for Sujarupa's male children to attend the primary school at Lakhaguda, but only about half of these pupils continued to study in the middle school until the age of twelve and fewer still completed the further four years of secondary school, let alone the one or two years at higher secondary school needed to qualify them for entrance to college.

Since independence, there have been a number of revisions of the national pattern of education. In earlier years, the most prestigious examination at the

Table 1 Literacy rates, 1971, for All-India, Kerala and Rajasthan by sex and urban/rural residence

		Percentage of Literacy		
		Males	*Females*	*Males & Females*
All-India	Rural	40	16	34
	Urban	70	49	60
	Rural & Urban Combined	46	22	35
Kerala	Rural	76	61	61
	Urban	83	69	76
	Rural & Urban Combined	77	63	70
Rajasthan	Rural	27	5	16
	Urban	65	35	51
	Rural & Urban Combined	34	10	23

Note: Population only over age of 4 counted in this analysis
Source: *India 1980*, Reference Annual published by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India

end of ten or more years at school was the Senior Cambridge, emanating from Cambridge, in England. Now its place has been taken by the Higher Secondary Examination. The Matriculation examination was once a respected alternative to the Senior Cambridge, but it persists in only a few localities, including parts of Mewar, Ajmer and Merwara. College entry is dependent upon the candidate's level of marks at his school-leaving examination, and is highly competitive. The basic university or college degree is a Bachelor of Arts, Science, or Commerce, taken at the end of a three-year course. In 1980 the Ministry of Education hoped to establish a uniform pattern of studies designated 10+2+3 to indicate the time spent in basic schooling, higher secondary school, and the degree course respectively – but this has not yet been adopted throughout the country. Meanwhile, in the schools accessible to Sujarupa, twelve years of progressively advancing studies still culminate in sitting the Matriculation examination; but very few pupils have as yet completed the course.

Although more of Sujarupa's boys are now receiving at least a modicum of basic education, this cannot be said of the girls. In 1980 only two young girls were attending school. At the local primary and middle schools, out of a total enrolment of 200 pupils, only twelve were girls – and most of these would cease to attend school as soon as they experienced their first menstruation. The Rawats, in common with several other Hindu communities, consider it unseemly, and prejudicial to a girl making a desirable marriage if she violates the rules of purdah and seclusion after the onset of puberty.

In Sujarupa, in 1980, only 19 per cent of the men – and none of the women – were literate. This reflects the strong prejudice which prevails against women

being educated, a prejudice apparently shared by the majority of the women themselves. It is only in the urban areas of Rajasthan that girls are beginning to be encouraged by their parents to attend school; but they still lag far behind the boys both in numbers and in the duration of their studies. My two dharm-bahinen were, like their sisters, completely illiterate, and accepted this as part of the natural order of things.

Among the young men, however, a long slow progress in education could be observed. In 1975, Laxman Singh was the first youth from Sujarupa to persevere with his studies until the age of seventeen, and to succeed in passing the 'Matric'. By 1980, three others had also done so, and in 1981 Devi Singh's son Tara Singh became the fifth young man from Sujarupa to aspire to be a 'Matric Pass'. All five of these promising students were obliged to interrupt their schooling at this point because their families needed their help, either as farmers or as wage-earners in military service or in factory work. Only one of them complained about his lot: this was Prem Singh, the youngest of the three surviving sons of Himat Singh who had died in the early 1960s, and the only one of his family to show a serious interest in his studies. During my first stay, I had come to know his father as an upright, hardworking but simple-minded man, known by his fellow villagers as being slightly mentally retarded. He had lived in a state of penury for most of his life; at times his children had had to beg for food from their neighbours. It was only when his sons became old enough to take over the management of their father's fields that the family began to know better days. Prem Singh did his share of farming work, but looked forward to spending some years in city employment, when his brothers agreed to his doing so.

The most recent candidate, Tara Singh, showed no regret at leaving school, but was determined to go out and try to find clerical employment in a city. He was impatient to experience urban life because other young men, visiting their homes on periods of leave, compared village life unfavourably with the excitements of the city. His father, who had worked in Ahmedabad for some nine years in his youth, knew that life in an industrial city could be harsh and unrewarding; but he also knew that Tara's curiosity about city life would not be satisfied until he had known it firsthand. With considerable forebodings and warnings about the difficulties which Tara could expect to encounter, Devi Singh was making plans for him to stay for a year or two in Ahmedabad, under the supervision of a kinsman who had already been working there for some time. Because of Tara's lack of experience of the world beyond the village, his father had rather low expectations of his being able to fend for himself for long, so far from home.

Laxman Singh on the other hand has been willingly supported in his career ambitions by his father, Kishan Singh, and by his younger brother, Mangu Singh, who is quite content to be a farmer. Laxman Singh showed himself to be both intelligent and farsighted. For example, he used his naval service to advance his education, taking courses of technical instruction at every

opportunity. His aim has been to become qualified in engine repairing and in servicing transistor radios because he feels confident that with these skills he can be sure of earning a good living when he leaves the navy. He has also taught himself some other practical skills, including first-aid and the treatment of common minor illnesses. On his home leave in 1981 he brought with him a number of medicines which he had bought in a Bombay pharmacy. He showed them to me – quinine tablets, aspirins, antacids, iron tablets for anaemia, multivitamin tablets and purgatives – in order to make sure that he knew the indications for their use. When he asked me what else he ought to bring I recommended benzyl benzoate lotion (which cures the painful itch of scabies, a common local affliction) and also taught him about oral rehydration which has saved the lives of many children suffering from diarrhoeal diseases.

In March, 1981, Laxman Singh had applied for leave in order to be with his wife in Sujarupa when she gave birth to a baby. A little over a year earlier she had given birth to a stillborn child, and he was determined to do everything he could to prevent this happening again. Having heard that the wife of the current government doctor in Todgarh was herself a doctor who had specialized in obstetrics, he took his wife to see her – the first instance of antenatal care in Sujarupa. The lady doctor assured them that all was well, but it was agreed that should any complication develop, he would bring his wife at once to the clinic – and Laxman Singh was pleased to accept my offer to drive them there, should need arise.

Fortunately all went well. His daughter was born in the early hours of 25 March. Later in the same day he invited me to see the mother and baby. When I entered their small room in his father Kishan Singh's house-yard, I was surprised to find that he had erected a mosquito net over his wife's string bed, in order to protect her and the baby, not from mosquitoes – which are not abundant at this season – but from swarms of flies found in this as in every other house in Sujarupa. This was the first time I had ever seen a mosquito net in use in a Rajasthan village.

Unlike nearly every other emigrant from Sujarupa, Laxman Singh does not sentimentalize village life, nor underrate its drawbacks. For him, these are two in particular: the prevailing filth and squalor, and the lack of intellectual stimulation. He likes to visit his former home, is fond of his parents and his younger brother and is warmly greeted wherever he goes in the village; but he tells me that a four-week visit is long enough: by that time the disadvantages of rural life begin to outweigh the pleasure of meeting old friends and relatives and he finds himself becoming impatient to return to the city life in Bombay.

The village itself has undergone a gradual change both in size and in its physical layout. Its population has increased from 98 persons in 1950 to 169 persons in 1980 – an increase of 72 per cent. This is a lower rate of growth than that of the population of India as a whole which was 361 millions in 1951 and 684 millions in 1981 (according to the preliminary report of the census for that

year) giving an increase of just under 90 per cent. As we shall see in a subsequent chapter, this slower rate of growth can be attributed to the higher rates of mortality – especially infant mortality – in this part of Rajasthan as compared with other states in India.

In our count of households in July, 1980, Laxman Singh and I used the criteria of the census enumerators and found a total of thirty-six households, of which eighteen were extended families, fifteen nuclear families and three single persons living alone (namely Nathu/Dalla, blind Umibai and Sri Prem Giri, the holy man).

Many of the old houses had been rebuilt on a larger scale, whether or not they had become pakka; most of the new buildings were still of the old design with pitched roofs covered with baked red tiles. The majority of these new houses were erected outside the perimeter of the thorn fence which in 1950 enclosed all but one of the Rawats' houses. On either side of the *paul* new houses had been built with their gates opening directly to the outside and not, as before, into an inner lane. Others stood apart either singly or in clusters of two or three houses side by side, but with fences separating their yards for goats and cattle; the latter were the homes of groups of brothers who had formerly composed a single joint family.

As a result of this new openness of access, Sujarupa no longer gave the impression at night of a beleagured encampment. This is the further development of a process of change which has been going on for more than a hundred years. Early in the nineteenth century both Tod and Dixon remarked on the presence of walled and fortified villages into which the Mers would retreat when fighting broke out between themselves, or against the military detachments sent from Ajmer, Jodhpur or Udaipur to subjugate them. Following the pacification of 1822 and Colonel Dixon's encouragement of agriculture, these fortress-villages began to lose their old function. The historical sketch which introduced the 1904 District Gazetteer for Ajmer-Merwara includes this statement: 'Until the era of British rule, villages were large, often fortified or clustering round a stone fort. As warfare died out, so small villages or hamlets were increasingly built near cultivated fields and the fortified villages fell into ruins.'

Sujarupa's founding in about 1880 was part of this process of moving away from the large fortified village, but for some decades inter-village raids remained common enough occurrences to make it prudent for the hamlet to be closed and difficult of access at night. The increased opening-up of the layout of the village during 1950-80 can be seen as a consequence of the passage of years since the last outbreak of local warfare.

There were other changes, however, which were suggestive of a decline in the cohesion of the village kinship group. These included the disuse and deterioration of the stone *hathai* (sitting-place) near the centre of the village, where the panchayat used to hold its meetings. Its successor, a wide stone-paved platform surrounding the trunk of a tree just outside the

doorway of the *paul* was also in poor shape. This clearly suggested that the informal panchayat of the descendants of Suja/Rupa was no longer playing as important a role as before. I learned that even disputes between village households were no longer always dealt with in the village itself but might be taken for arbitration to the government-sponsored panchayat at the village of Kachabli, three miles off, or even to the magistrate's court in Bhim, fifteen miles distant.

The most conspicuous evidence of communal apathy was shown by the condition of the *paul* itself with its sagging, leaky roof, its peeling walls and its heavy door hanging ajar, partly off its hinges. All this gave the impression of a community which had lost its cohesion, but events in the spring of 1981 showed that this was not entirely the case. On my farewell visit in June, 1981, I found that both the *paul* and the hathai just outside its entrance had been completely restored. The villagers had been goaded into action by the derogatory remarks made by fellow-Rawats among the many visitors who had come to attend the funeral feast of Devi Singh's wife Dhakubai. The village panchayat sprang into action and called on every household to contribute their labour or money; as a result, the renovation was completed in eighteen days. This showed that the village could still share a common aim, and work together to achieve it. The informal panchayat of Sujaji's progeny has survived its years of internal strife and has shown that it is again capable of uniting the villagers in a co-operative undertaking, when the will is there.

Another change is worthy of attention. This is the growth, since 1950, of the number of active participants in sessions of bhajan-singing, and the increased frequency of these sessions. Although he makes no pretensions to being a bhagat himself, because he remains very much a man of the world, Devi Singh has become the leader of those who engage in bhakti. The sessions have been held in the *paul*, in other villagers' house-yards and in the shrine beside the road, where many of the participants sit on the road itself since the shrine can accommodate only a limited number: but they take place most frequently in the open paved courtyard in front of Devi Singh's house, and at his initiative.

In 1950, the most active participants were young men such as Devi Singh, Nathu Singh, Rupa Singh and Hira Singh. The older men such as Pitha Singh, Ham Singh and Asa Singh took little part: in fact Himat Singh was the only one of their age who attended regularly. In 1980 and 1981 one could recognize members of all three generations in the group of singers – grandfathers, fathers and young men on the threshold of adulthood, together with a number of children looking on. Three quite small children had learned to perform a simple dance, and were called upon to do so when the fervour of the worship was beginning to rise, but at a later stage it was only the older men who allowed themselves to become carried away and would then perform a curious, ecstatic dance, involving bending forward deeply, and turning round and round in a small space in the middle of the seated company.

One could already recognize in Prem Singh, Mithu Singh and Teja Singh the most accomplished players and singers of the rising generation. These satsangs differed from those of thirty years earlier in that many more women now came to look on, sitting at the periphery of the main group and never joining in the singing, but sharing in the uplift of spirits of these occasions. Another change was that it had become a regular practice for the host to prepare several pipes or cheroots filled with a mixture of tobacco and cannabis resin. When the session had been under way for an hour or two, these would be passed from hand to hand, and many – though not all – of the participants would take one or two deep inhalations (holding the pipe or cheroot in his fist in such a way that his lips did not touch it and make it ritually unclean). In their separate group the women would also share in a round of smoking. After this refreshment, the singing would be resumed with heightened fervour.

In 1950 I frequently heard the old men of the village (such as Pitha Singh, Ham Singh, Asa Singh and Dalla Singh) speak disparagingly of the new religiosity which their sons and nephews had acquired during their years in Ahmedabad or in the army. By 1980 all of these senior citizens had died and bhakti appeared to be accepted by everyone in the village as a communal activity which was both an act of piety and a joyful entertainment. It could be viewed as another example of Sanskritization, enabling the Rawats to press their claim for a higher caste status – or else, quite differently, as a renunciation of social rank in pursuit of a more important religious self-realization. Unquestionably, bhakti has come to mean a great deal in the life of Sujarupa in the 1980s. Its practice brings together old and young and males and females from all the households, thus helping to cement a unity in this community which was deeply divided for a number of years. It has also raised the self-esteem of its members because Sujarupa has acquired a local reputation for the ardour of its bhakti sessions.

However, if we borrow the anthropologist Robert Redfield's habitual question, 'What do these people enjoy?', we find ourselves with two apparently contradictory answers: one, that they enjoy identifying themselves as Chauhan Rajputs, the descendants of famous warrior-kings, and the other, that they are humble worshippers of a God in whose presence all men can become equal through the sincerity of their devotion. Hinduism has a genius for being able simultaneously to embrace contradictions, so no doubt both of these sources of gratification will continue to flourish in Sujarupa – but with this difference: the claim to be Chauhans is one which can be asserted within the Rawat community, but although it has been advanced for at least 150 years it has made little progress towards acceptance by the wider community (least of all, by the Rajputs); in contrast, acceptance as sincere devotees of bhakti-marg is attainable to any sufficiently dedicated individual or group, and this is a path along which Sujarupa appears to have made considerable progress.

This is a point to which I shall return, when comparing the directions of change in this and other small communities which have been observed over extended periods of time (*see* Appendix 1).

8

Health Care: a Stubborn Resistance to Change

When I began my stay in Sujarupa I was concerned about the heavy demands which might be made upon my time in treating the sick. However, I soon found that these demands were not going to be excessive. Each day about ten or a dozen patients would come to consult me. Many of them had disabilities of long standing, and came in the hope that I might have a remedy for their affliction; others presented recent, and more readily treatable, conditions.

At first, their behaviour was deceptively similar to that of a Western patient. They would sit in front of me and offer their outstretched hand, clearly expecting me to take their pulse, which I did. I assumed that they must have consulted Western-trained doctors, or Ayurvedic practitioners before, and learned about pulse-taking from them: but here I was quite wrong. It was not doctors, but exorcists and magical healers who had taught them the importance of feeling the pulse at the beginning of a consultation – but their procedure was quite different from the one which I had been taught in medical school. One of my earliest patients, whose acute dysentery had responded quickly to my medication, was Amar Singh, a celebrated exorcist of ghosts and witches. He was kind enough to give me some elementary instruction on feeling the pulse, as practised by local exorcists. Here, the healer is not paying attention to the rate, regularity and blood-pressure of the pulse in the radial artery, as I had been taught to do: instead, he lays his forefinger across his patient's wrist and waits for the telltale quiverings of the finger-tendons which inform him whether a witch, a ghost or an evil charm has invaded the patient's body.

My village clients naturally assumed that when I took their pulse I was practising a similar skill. They expected me, as a competent exorcist, to pronounce the nature of the harmful spirit; but, to their dismay, instead of doing so I would turn to them and ask what was the matter. They would look at me, disconcerted, and exclaim: 'Oh Babuji, you are much cleverer than us – it is for *you* to tell *us* what has made us ill.'

This served to remind me that my patients and I had each brought to the clinical encounter our quite different assumptions about the nature and the cause of illness, and about the behaviour to be expected of a healer and his

patient. Since I was a stranger, intruding in their midst, I felt it my responsibility to learn as much as I could about their concepts of sickness and healing; but my first task was, I thought, to diagnose and if possible treat their condition.

I had to explain that my kind of medicine required me to ask about any pains or other symptoms which had been causing them distress; only then could I decide which medicine would be the right one to cure their illness. Many of my patients were disconcerted to learn how different was my kind of medical practice from that of their own magical healers. In their community everybody knows that the commonest cause of illness is the invasion of the sick person's body by a supernatural power: this may be the action of a witch, a ghost, a god or goddess or a sorcerer's charm. A healer, in their view, is one who himself has magical powers strong enough to exorcise the witch, appease the gods and counteract the sorcerer's charm. It clearly dismayed them to see how little I seemed to know about these basic facts of life: if I knew so little about the supernatural world, how could my medicines be strong enough to cure them?

Quite soon, I learned that it was helpful to talk with my patients about the advice given them by the priest, exorcist or other healer with supernatural powers, and then to explain that my healing worked in a different way. Only after this preliminary had been completed did I ask them to tell me about their symptoms.

When they did so they very often showed that in addition to their beliefs about the supernatural causes of illness they had a simple, abbreviated understanding of some of the teachings of Ayurvedic medicine, which has been practised in India for over two thousand years. In particular, they would invoke one or another of the three *dosa,* or humours, which, according to Ayurveda, circulate within our bodies. These are *kapha, pitta* and *vayu* (phlegm, bile and wind respectively). In health, they remain in a state of equilibrium, but if one or another becomes excessive, then particular symptoms arise, such as rheumatic pains if there is an excess of *kapha,* bilious dyspepsia if there is too much *pitta* and chills associated with *vayu.* The villagers know that the balance between the dosas must be restored, by controlling the amounts of 'hot' or 'cold' foods in one's diet. An Indian *Vaid,* or practitioner of Ayurvedic medicine, always ends his consultation with a few words of advice about foods to avoid, or to take, along with the prescribed treatment. If I failed to do this, my patients would jog my memory by saying *'Kathai parhez kya?'* ('Cut down on bitter spices?'). I learned to give my patients some innocuous dietary recommendations, because they obviously felt that my treatment was incomplete without this traditional advice.

It was not necessary for me to pretend that I shared their beliefs about the supernatural, but it was important to let them know that I was aware of these beliefs and respected their convictions. Once this was done, they became more relaxed and talked readily about the supernatural agent responsible for

their illness and the healing magic which had been employed. (Indian patients have no qualms about submitting themselves to more than one form of therapy at the same time.)

The villagers accepted my medicines in a polite but guarded manner. They were willing to give my drugs a trial, but if their symptoms were not relieved dramatically within one or two days they usually did not consult me again. This was a humbling experience, to feel that my Western skills were being weighed against those of the village healers, and found wanting; but in 1950, in particular, I became very conscious of the limitations both of my diagnostic skills and of my modest array of medicines.

I soon came to know that many of my patients were consulting magical healers at the same time as they sought my help. On one occasion the exorcist Amar Singh and I were called simultaneously. This was late one evening in March, 1950, when Amar Singh was obliging me by letting me administer the Rorschach test to him, by the light of my pressure lamp. We were interrupted by a distraught man from an outlying village who told us that his wife was in great pain and begged us to help. We set the Rorschach cards aside and took my lamp to light the path to his village which was nearly two miles off, in the jungle. As we approached the village we could heard her screams of pain. When we entered his courtyard we found her lying on the ground, writhing in agony.

There followed a delay because both Amar Singh and I were each urging the other to be the first to treat her. In the end I had to admit defeat in this contest of politeness. When I examined her I found that she was suffering from shingles (herpes zoster), a viral infection in which a crop of sometimes intensely painful blisters appears in a ring round the lower part of the chest. I gave her some analgesic tablets and told her husband that I would give him an astringent lotion from my medicine chest to paint over the blisters.

Then it was Amar Singh's turn. He felt her wrist, pronounced the trouble to be caused by malignant sorcery and whispered a protective charm which he blew over her body. He called for a brass pot filled with water and dropped a leaf of the sacred pipal tree into the pot, along with another whispered charm. The pot was placed on the roof of their cottage so that no inauspicious shadow could fall upon it. By this time our patient had become much calmer. Her previous howls were, I believe, prompted not only by the pain in her chest but also by her fear that some diabolical agent was about to destroy her. Amar Singh's protective magic had allayed her panic, while my analgesics had perhaps helped by lessening the intensity of her pain. We were escorted back to Sujarupa by her husband, to whom I was able to give a small bottle of lotion. Three days later he came to tell me that his wife was feeling much better because of my ministrations – and no doubt he said the same to Amar Singh too.

There was a great deal of sickness in Sujarupa and its neighbouring villages. Almost every day I would be invited to enter a village house to see

someone who was sick or disabled. I saw old people with cataract and with rheumatism, and people of all ages with stomach or bowel disorders, or with persistent coughs (because this was in January and February, the height of the short cold season). I knew that pulmonary tuberculosis is endemic in this area, but so are chronic bronchitis and bronchiectasis; after a purely clinical examination it was often difficult to reach a confident differential diagnosis, so I concentrated on relieving the most distressing symptoms. At that date the new drugs (streptomycin, para-aminosalicyclic acid and isoniazide) which were going to revolutionize the outcome of pulmonary tuberculosis were not yet widely available – but at least I had a good stock of sulphonamides which enabled me to treat successfully a number of cases of pneumonia and acute bacillary dysentery which until recently had had a poor prognosis.

My first – and lasting – impression of life inside the village was one of squalor. There was evidence on all sides of abundant opportunities for the spread of fly-borne infections. Nor was this new. When I consulted the decennial Census Reports and Gazetteers of Ajmer-Merwara and the descriptions of Mer tribes by James Tod and C. G. Dixon in the first half of the nineteenth century I found many references to the poverty and filth of the Mer villages at that time.

In 1981 the lanes of Sujarupa were still littered with the excrement of cattle, dogs and children. The adjacent fields and jungle served as open-air toilets for all the villagers, while within the village the house-yards were swept clean at least once a day, only to be soiled again by goats and cattle. Flies abounded everywhere, even in the cold season, but in particular during the long hot weather.

A hundred years earlier the Census Report for 1881 had commented not only on the lack of hygiene but also on the Merwara villagers' indifference to their personal cleanliness. This is no longer the case. Admittedly the Rawats do not bathe every day during the cold months from December to February, but during the rest of the year most of them bathe daily in fresh water drawn from the well. The women, however, are greatly constrained by their needing to observe purdah: they have to bathe furtively in a secluded corner of their house-yard and even there they cannot remove their voluminous skirts while they dip a brass lotah into a larger waterpot, in order to sluice themselves from head to foot. This puts them to so much trouble that they bathe only occasionally. Their small children are bathed daily by their mothers, but since they sit and play during most of the day in the dirt and dust of the village lanes they do not keep clean for long. Not surprisingly, their minor cuts and bruises usually become infected and are slow to heal; they also often suffer from inflammation of their eyelids, aggravated by rubbing them with their dusty fists. A fretful child with purulent discharge from his (or her) eyes attracting dozens of flies is an all too common sight in the village.

One consequence of the Rawats' claim to be Hindus – and members of the high-caste community of Rajputs – is that they observe certain forms of ritual

cleanliness. For example, both before and after I was served a meal in a village house one of my hosts would pour water from a brass pot to enable me to wash my hands. This courtesy was appreciated because here, as everywhere in rural India, we eat with our fingers; but I noticed that the children were seldom reminded to wash their hands before a meal, and even the adults often did so only in a perfunctory manner.

To a Western observer, the prevalence of communicable diseases in Indian villages seems appallingly high. It is easy to forget that similar high rates of sickness were found in Britain only last century – particularly in the insanitary urban slums whose rapid growth was one of the features of the Industrial Revolution. Diseases such as typhoid, smallpox, and cholera (which we now regard as tropical diseases) became so threatening to life in the cities that they inspired the creation of a Public Health Service whose first tasks were to bring about better standards of sanitation, to provide safe drinking water and to offer vaccination against smallpox. The last of a series of epidemics of cholera occurred in London in 1856 and gave Dr John Snow the opportunity to demonstrate that it was spread by a contaminated water supply.

The greatest killing disease in Britain at that time was tuberculosis. The standardized death rate for this disease was 2901 per million in 1848; by 1971 it had fallen to only 13 per million. It was widely believed that the conquering of tuberculosis was due to the discovery of new antituberculosis drugs, first introduced in 1947 and widely available some five years later; but Professor Thomas McKeown (1979) has reminded us that improvements in hygiene, housing and nutrition among the poorest citizens of England had been associated with a steady decline in deaths due to tuberculosis throughout the hundred years from 1848-1948: in fact, 75 per cent of the decline in mortality from 2901 to 13 per million had already taken place before the introduction of the new drugs. These drugs did, however, accelerate the annual decline after 1947.

This is a reminder of the fact that in India, as in other developing countries today, the infectious diseases which are still widely prevalent will not be overcome by 'wonder-drugs' alone, but also by improving the population's standards of nutrition, hygiene and protective immunization.

Another evidence of the high rates of sickness and death in nineteenth-century England comes from a survey by B. S. Rowntree (1901), who showed that as late as 1898 the infant death rate among the poorest inhabitants in the city of York was no less than 247 per thousand which is more than ten times greater than present-day figures and was much higher than the contemporary rates for England as a whole.

Because death rates in infancy are a useful indicator of standards of health care, in 1950 I made a note of all the children born in Sujarupa in the five years beginning in 1945, and followed them up. There were twenty children in this count, of whom five had died before reaching their fifth birthday. If one were to express this small number as an incomplete infant mortality rate, it would

be 250 deaths per thousand live births. In 1980, I repeated this inquiry collecting a cohort of children of whom ten had already died before the age of five, giving a rate of 254 per thousand.

In comparison, infant mortality rates in the states of India ranged from the lowest rates, of 24 per thousand in Kerala and 34 in Haryana to 76 in Rajasthan and 84 per thousand in Uttar Pradesh (Panikar, 1971). There is clearly an enormous disparity between the rates in Sujarupa and those found in Rajasthan and other states – just as there was between those in the slums of York and the national average for England at the time of Rowntree's survey.

Data gathered in successive censuses in India have shown that both birth rates and death rates are lower in communities in which literacy exceeds the national average. In 1971, Kerala had a literacy rate of 60 per cent among those over the age of fifteen, compared with a national literacy rate of 30 per cent. At the other end of the scale the rural areas of Rajasthan had a literacy rate of 17 per cent; but this was very unequally divided between the sexes. In Sujarupa, at the time of our 1980 census, there were ten literate males out of a total of 53 aged fifteen or more, giving a literacy rate of 19 per cent, but there was not a single literate woman.

Here, perhaps, is the clue to the persistence of high death rates in Sujarupa's children. In this village, as in most of rural Rajasthan, the major decisions in the work of the fields, in business matters, in concerns of the extended family and in the meetings of the (all-male) village panchayat are taken by the men; but the care of young children is women's work – and women have been prevented from attending school for more than a year or two, if not entirely. Consequently, young mothers, mothers-in-law and grandmothers have this in common; they are all illiterate, profoundly superstitious and very conservative about matters of religion and traditional customs. They firmly believe in the supernatural origin of most illnesses. When a child falls ill they become anxious and fearful – not without reason – and ask their husbands to accompany them to their favoured shrine, or to consult a magical healer of repute.

Both in Sujarupa and in the much larger village of Delwara, near Udaipur, in which I lived and practised medicine throughout 1951, my patients repeatedly told me that no medicine, however powerful, will effect a cure unless the patient has complete faith in his healer. It embarrasses a Western doctor when his Indian patient praises him extravagantly, and claims him as his personal Guru, or as his father; but one learns that the patient only feels safe, and in good hands, when his healer accepts a personal, responsible relationship with him. This is an aspect of medical practice which used to be emphasized in Western medicine more than it is today: when the doctor had few really potent drugs at his command he knew the importance of a good beside manner which supported the patient's morale and reinforced his will to live. This is still very important in village medicine in India. Patients wish to believe that their doctor cares about them, and set great store by his telling

them that they will recover: in fact to fail to give them these assurances amounts to malpractice.

Having watched parents consult Bhopas, exorcists and other traditional healers about their child's illness on many occasions, I could not fail to observe their high level of anxiety and their longing for reassurance. There was something especially reassuring in the Bhopa's entering a state of possession because this enabled the distraught mother to speak directly to the god in whose power she had great faith: she and her husband would take heart from the god's assurance that their child would recover. They would be instructed about the offerings they should bring, and the rituals of worship they should perform, and then set about these tasks in the confident belief that they were playing their part in ensuring their child's recovery.

It appears to me that the spiritual healer's main role is to allay the parents' anxiety. If the child recovers, they will gladly bring him (or her) back to the shrine on future holy days in order to express their gratitude; but if the illness (or, as they see it, the invading spirit) proves too strong to be overcome by the god whom they have consulted, their anxieties will return with increased intensity while they try to find another healer with stronger magic at his command.

Eventually, they may consult the government medical clinic, but they do this reluctantly, without any strong expectation that its medicine will succeed where their traditional healers have failed; and by this time the child is often so ill that the chances of recovery are slim. Such was the case for Ghisa Singh's son, Tilok Singh, who died in March, 1981: his life could have been saved by timely antibiotics, but his mother and grandmother put their trust in the Devji Bhopa instead.

This, however, is only half the story. One has also to consider why the government clinic, which has existed for a hundred years, has made such slow progress in gaining the villagers' confidence. I discussed this question with a succession of clinic doctors, from 1950 to 1981, and heard much the same story from them all. They were profoundly unhappy in their work, because they had spent the previous six or seven years studying at a medical college and its relatively well-equipped teaching hospital, in a large city. In contrast they felt the conditions of life in the village of Todgarh to be a severe deprivation. They missed the company of educated friends (even the teachers in Todgarh's higher secondary school were only modestly educated and limited in their interests). They missed the cinema, to which young Indian townspeople are addicted. They were also full of complaints about the lack of hospital services to which they had become accustomed, especially the access to X-rays and to clinical laboratory tests. (Here, they had my sympathy: I knew from my own experience how much our allopathic medicine has come to rely upon laboratory aids in order to reach a firm diagnosis among the many forms of infection which are endemic in India. It is frustrating to be obliged to practise in a manner which is partly guesswork when one knows that the

scientific indentification of these diseases is attainable elsewhere.)

Clearly, these young doctors were unhappy in their work. Their common desire was to complete their compulsory term of rural service as soon as possible and then seek higher training in a specialty or start work in private practice in a city. Meanwhile, however, their behaviour did little either to make their stay in Todgarh more enjoyable, or to enhance the reputation of their clinic.

The villagers were highly critical of these doctors. Their foremost complaint was of the discourtesy with which they and their families were treated. They were kept waiting for long periods, and often had to pay a bribe to one of the auxiliary staff before they were allowed to see the doctor; and he made it clear that he regarded village people as being stupid, uneducated and of inferior status. Many accusations were made of petty extortions of money for drugs or treatment which were supposed to be free. Accounts were given to me of doctors who devoted most of their time to treating a few of the rich merchants of Todgarh and in surrounding villages, leaving the work of the clinic in the hands of their subordinates. Clearly, my informants' encounters with government medicine had been such that they could not possibly develop a relationship of trustful dependence either with the doctor or with members of his staff: and without such a relationship, they believed, no treatment could be successful.

This recital of accusations made it clear why villagers from Sujarupa seldom availed themselves of the clinic's services – but it seemed to be hardly credible that every doctor behaved so discreditably. When I asked Devi Singh whether there had not been one or two among the succession of young doctors who could be trusted, he thought about this for some time and then said that he could remember only one, who served in the clinic for a year and a half in 1965-66. This was a man who really seemed to care about his patients, who treated villagers courteously, and who was not preoccupied like the rest with trying to make money on the side. If only there were more doctors like him, said Devi Singh, people would have more faith in the clinic.

The clinic doctors whom I met in 1980 were husband and wife. Dr D. K. Gajwani had graduated from Ranchi Medical College in Bihar – a good 1000 miles or more from here – but his wife's medical training had been completed in Ajmer, only eighty miles away. Dr Gajwani was eager to tell me about the drawbacks of rural practice, accusing the local villagers of being ignorant and prejudiced and complaining of the inadequate amounts of drugs at his disposal: for example, he sees many cases of pulmonary tuberculosis at his clinic, but his entire year's supply of streptomycin, essential for their treatment, was only one hundred phials. Dr Gajwani also complained that local 'politics' are interfering with the conduct of the clinic. Each of his four immediate predecessors in Todgarh was removed from his post following complaints that he was charging fees for drugs and services which should have been free; and now similar charges have been laid against him. He was,

indeed, removed from Todgarh before his two-year appointment had finished.

The next to come was a Dr S. K. Vijaivergia who had just completed two years' postgraduate training in surgery, with his wife Dr Saroj Vijaivergia, who had specialized in obstetrics and gynaecology. When I met them in March, 1981, they admitted to being disappointed in the very limited facilities of the clinic, but the husband planned to carry out at least some minor surgery, and his wife hoped to encourage local mothers to come to the clinic for antenatal examination, and where necessary to have their delivery under her care. Dr Vijaivergia owned a motorcycle and was using it to visit surrounding villages in order to discover prevailing illnesses in the district.

They were an engaging couple, full of plans for improving the clinic's services; but only three months later I found that their enthusiasm had not been sustained, nor had they won the confidence of the villagers. They were now looking forward to the day when they would be free to leave Todgarh and establish a joint private practice in Udaipur, their home town. This failure to sustain their original promise was disappointing, since this area evidently could use a good – or even a very modest – maternal and child health service.

The Todgarh clinic operates an unvarying routine. It is open for outpatient consultations six days a week, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the winter months, and from 7 a.m. to noon in the hot weather. Quite unlike the outpatient clinics of city hospitals, it never appeared to be overcrowded. When I examined its daily record of attendances I found them ranging from thirty to ninety patients, many of whom were calling to have a dressing changed or a prescription renewed; its staff of two doctors, a nurse and a dispenser were evidently not overworked. This pattern of under-use of the Primary Health Centre is all too often reported, particularly in the states of Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Himachal Pradesh in which more than four-fifths of the Primary Health Centres are incompletely staffed; but this is by no means the whole story. In Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the PHCs are fully staffed and well utilized, and all over the country there are individual projects (most of which are associated with medical college departments of community medicine) which have succeeded in gaining the trust of the people whom they serve.

It is still open to question whether compelling doctors to serve for two years in somewhat primitive rural clinics is going to be the most efficient way to bring modern medicine to the villagers. In educationally backward states, of which Rajasthan is an example, the social gap between illiterate villagers and city-bred doctors is wide, and not easily bridged. An important element has been missing from most young doctors' training: that is, how to establish a good rapport with their rural patients. All too often the doctor is keenly aware of his own superior status and shows little interest in the patient's traditional beliefs about the cause and cure of illness. Such an attitude prevents the development of mutual respect, without which the patient will be unable to trust his doctor, or his doctor's kind of medicine.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule. Some young doctors are able to convince their patients that they respect them, and are concerned to help them. When this happens, the doctor's repute rises in the villagers' estimation, his clinic is well attended and – like a shrine which has become celebrated for healing – its fame spreads among the neighbouring villages.

A similar charismatic role can be played by the village health workers and the multipurpose health workers, who have the advantage over the doctors that they belong to the rural community. In their training the main emphasis is naturally laid upon instruction in the tasks of health education, recognition of common diseases and issue of appropriate medication; but they too have it in their power to inspire confidence in their sincerity, and by so doing to strengthen their patients' trust in their treatment. The clinic in Todgarh demonstrates that to make new, modern treatments available is not enough, if the patient's trust has not been won. We shall return to this point when we consider recent developments in rural health care in India, but before doing so I should like to report briefly on mental health at the village level.

9

Mental Health in Sujarupa

We have been considering so far only physical illness, as though we shared the belief (widespread among India's educated middle class) that mental disorders are rarely found among those healthy children of nature, the peasants. This is a completely mistaken idea. Field surveys in rural areas of Karnataka, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Haryana have shown that there are substantial numbers of villagers in each of these areas who are suffering from mental disturbances serious enough to interrupt their normal way of life. For example, when Professor N. N. Wig and Dr Srinivas Murthy screened a large series of patients attending a rural Primary Health Centre in Raipur Rani, Haryana, they found that 17 per cent were suffering from a mental, and not physical, disorder. In south Kanara, my colleague Professor R. L. Kapur carried out a door-to-door village health survey in which he found that 8 per cent of the villagers currently complained of three or more psychiatric symptoms, severe enough to interfere with their usual work and to have caused them to seek help – usually from a traditional healer.

At the beginning of my stay in Sujarupa I was keenly aware of the high prevalence of disease and of malnutrition. When my patients complained of weakness, loss of appetite, poor sleep and lack of energy it was easy to attribute these symptoms to chronic physical illness – but there were some exceptions. For example, within the first few days I was told about two villagers who had, for a time, shown unmistakable symptoms of psychosis.

One of these was Moti Singh, son of Surat Singh, a young man in his early twenties. In mid-1948, while living in Ahmedabad and working at one of the cotton-mills, he became feverish and felt ill. He consulted a doctor and was given two injections, but his fever did not abate. Instead he suddenly became very talkative, aggressive towards the friends with whom he shared a room, and disturbed in his behaviour. When he began to tear off all his clothes and shout abuse at strangers, his room-mates took him to the city's mental hospital (at that time, still known as the *pagal khana* or madhouse) where he remained in confinement for ten days. A telegram was sent to Sujarupa about his illness, and Devi Singh travelled to Ahmedabad to bring him home. His task was not easy because, although Moti Singh had quietened down in

hospital, he again became very confused, noisy and violent during the journey so that Devi Singh had to tie his arms behind his back with his turban in order to keep him under control.

Once back in the village, Moti Singh remained noisy, shouting and singing, and threatening to beat his mother and his young wife. He was tied to a tree in his own house-yard for some three weeks before his excitement abated. During this time he was taken, still bound with ropes, to the shrine of Danaji, whose Bhopa became possessed and told his kinsmen that Moti Singh's madness was caused by the ghost of a man who had been killed in a street accident in Ahmedabad. Moti Singh had, without being aware of it, urinated on the place where this man had been killed and this had angered his ghost. A goat was sacrificed to propitiate the ghost, and in the course of the next five weeks his behaviour gradually returned to normal, and he was released from his bonds.

Moti Singh himself was able to recall, and describe to me, the onset of his illness and many incidents during his spells of overexcitement. He did not seem to be embarrassed in doing so; after all, to incur the anger of a ghost is something which might happen to anyone.

In psychiatric terms his illness had all the attributes of an attack of mania, perhaps triggered off by his initial high fever. When I first got to know him (and he was among those who helped me pitch my tent on the day of my arrival) he showed no indication of having once been seriously mentally ill. Later, however, he told me that there have been occasions in his life when he has become very restless, for no apparent reason, and has simply disappeared, travelling by bus or train (usually without a ticket) to towns in which he is a complete stranger.

This happened again, in March, 1950, just before the bridegroom's escort assembled to accompany another Moti Singh, the son of Hama Singh, to his wedding in Togi village. Moti/Surat abruptly disappeared for three weeks, having made his way to the city of Indore, two full days' journey from Sujarupa. On his return he told me that he had no special reason to visit this city, and having arrived he found himself penniless, but an amiable citizen befriended him until his restless mood abated and he set out on his ticketless journey home. Moti/Surat was a friendly person. We met and exchanged news on each of my return visits to Sujarupa, and on none of these occasions did he show any signs of mental disorder.

In 1981 he took pride in showing me his well-kept fields and his two handsome teenaged sons – his first two children, being girls, had married and left home. When I recalled his former fits of restlessness he smiled, and said that it was many years since he had last felt like that; nor had he ever experienced another spell of madness.

Another villager, the elderly Himat Singh (born in 1895), had suffered two attacks of insanity. The first of these occurred in 1910 quite suddenly. He spoke loudly to himself and abused and threatened anyone who came near. A

man who was known to have perfected some very powerful mantras was consulted. He divined that this was a ghost-affliction, due to the spirit of a man who had died very recently. An offering of *channa* (chick-peas) was prepared, and passed three times over Himat Singh's head, and then deposited at the cremation-ground. After this, Himat Singh's excitement gradually left him and his behaviour returned to normal. He remained well until 1942, when he was aged forty-seven. At this time he was involved, together with Hira Singh and Nol Singh, in a bitter quarrel over the distribution of Dungar Singh's fields after his death. The village panchayat put all three out of the caste, which meant that no member of the other twenty-two households would speak to them or even recognize them. This proved more than Himat Singh could bear. Once again he became crazy, shouting abuse and threats at anyone who passed near his house, and accusing them of having intercourse with his wife. Presumably because of his being outcasted, no steps were taken to find a magical healer; but when Hira Singh made peace with the panchayat and the three were readmitted into the community, Himat Singh soon returned to his normal quiet self.

Mol Singh, however, described this illness differently: he said that Himat Singh had brought it upon himself by cutting too many branches from a pipal tree, which everyone knew to be the abode of a ghost. Mol Singh was less tolerant than his fellows of violent behaviour: when Himat Singh threatened him with a stick, being much the stronger he overpowered the older man, tied his arms to his sides and warned him that if he made such threats again he would be beaten. Apparently this rough handling had the desired effect: even in his madness Himat Singh was prudent enough, after this encounter, to exempt Mol Singh from his abuse.

These were the only cases of outright psychosis which I found in the village, but even in the early days I could not fail to see that symptoms of physical distress were often accompanied by severe anxiety. This was brought home to me by Gomin Singh's young wife, who became hysterical with fear when the labour pains of her first delivery became strong: she got it into her head that a ghost was threatening her life. After examining her, I was able to assure her and her assembled relatives that the baby was well and would soon be born, and she was relieved of her excess of panic.

Another instructive patient was a Jain merchant suffering from pericarditis, a complication of typhoid fever. His racing heartbeat responded only slightly to my medication, but was dramatically relieved by a magician's powerful charm accompanied by branding the back of his neck with a red-hot iron. This saved him, in the nick of time, from being the victim of death-dealing sorcery. His intense anxiety abated at once, although his disease continued its slow course.

During my first months in the village I remained somewhat insensitive to symptoms which were emotionally rather than physically determined. On rereading my field notes I was surprised to find, on my first full day in the

village, the record of a conversation with one Phul Chand, the recently arrived postmaster of Lakhaguda. My notes reminded me that he was an insecure, loudmouthed and rather disagreeable person; he wanted everyone to know that he and I were highly educated people, much superior to ordinary villagers. I was not at all pleased to find myself paired with this egregious person – particularly when, after he had left us, I was told that he was an impostor, claiming to be a Brahmin although the only Brahmin in Lakhaguda did not believe his claim. Before leaving us, Phul Chand asked me if I had a remedy for his feelings of general weakness. I put him off by saying that I would try to find out what made him feel weak before deciding on the remedy. He ignored this and again asked me for a strength-giving medicine, saying that a friend of his also suffered from weakness which, said Phul Chand, was due to a discharge of semen in his urine, the consequence of his having consorted too often with prostitutes. I was frankly puzzled about the nature of this complaint. Was he suffering from gonorrhoea or urethritis? – but no, he did not complain of pain on urinating nor did he find it difficult to pass water; and he had no painful swellings in his joints. I made a note about the possibility that he was suffering from a hypochondriacal fear of having contracted some venereal disease; he did not act upon my invitation to consult me privately, instead of in a crowd. I did not see him again because he was appointed to another village post office, many miles away.

Although I did not know it at the time – and had even forgotten all about Phul Chand – this was a significant encounter. He was the first of many patients to consult me about the ailment locally known as *jiryan*, the escape through the urine of 'spoiled semen'. This is a culturally defined ailment, based on Ayurvedic teaching that a man who is in really good health is one who eats pure food, in moderation; who avoids meat and alcohol; who behaves in accordance with the rules of his caste and who does not yield to the baser passions, including anger and sex. Such ideal conduct enables a man to accumulate, in a reservoir just under the top of his skull, a quantity of pure white semen (often referred to as sugar) and such a man appears to be radiant with good health. On the other hand, violation of the rules of behaviour results in his semen's becoming curdled and leaking away and, as this happens, he feels increasingly weak.

During 1951, when I lived among high-caste Hindus in a larger village, I came to recognize jiryan as a form of hypochondria which is associated with guilt provoked by breaking the rules of one's caste – especially the rules forbidding too frequent or promiscuous sex.

In Sujarupa I was sometimes asked to prescribe medicines for young women whose symptoms were frankly hysterical and were clearly related to sexual trauma. In this community, child marriage was still quite common. After the ceremony, the girl remained in her parents' village until she reached puberty, and only then went to live with her husband, who was supposed to wait until she had reached the mature age of fifteen or sixteen before

consummating their marriage – but often this was done prematurely, and traumatically. One of these girls was now in her twenties; after a painful defloration at the age of twelve she had developed hysterical fits, which occurred frequently – but only in her husband's village. Whenever she went to her natal village, to visit her parents, the fits disappeared, only to return when she rejoined her husband.

These were neurotic illnesses, in which the underlying emotions of guilt or fear were easily recognized; but it took many months for me to be able to differentiate normal states of anxiety appropriate to a perceived threat (as when a child fell ill) from exaggerated anxiety over imaginary threats, which a young woman's relatives judged to be unrealistic. There were many sources of reality-based anxiety in the young women's world; but the all-pervasive fear of the village witch was a special case in which this fear could not be given free expression (in psychiatric terminology, it could not be abreacted) because to pronounce the witch's name would result in the unleashing of her anger and malevolence. One cannot regard fear of the witch as a neurosis, because it is a widely shared, culturally endorsed belief – and shared beliefs are social realities. The hard life which a young married woman has to endure in a village full of her husband's kin (in whose presence she must hide her face), at the beck and call of her mother-in-law, is also a social reality.

Both in 1950 and in 1980 I was informed about murders of recently married brides. A young girl from Lakhaguda failed to return to her husband's house one day in 1948. On the following day, vultures were seen assembling in a field belonging to Chatar Singh of Sujarupa, and it was found that they were attracted by the mutilated body of this girl. She had been killed by knife wounds, and her feet had been cut off so that her attacker could obtain two heavy silver anklets which she had been wearing. Suspicion fell on a woman, a daughter of Chatar Singh, but no evidence was forthcoming. Finally Chatar Singh gave a feast to the members of the district panchayat, and the case was closed.

In 1980, Rupa Singh told me how, only seventeen months earlier, his fifteen-year-old daughter had died suddenly in her husband's village some twenty-five miles away. Word reached him that she had been killed by her husband at the instigation of his jealous mistress. Rupa Singh reported this to the police and a charge of murder was made out against the husband; but he assembled a number of bribed witnesses and the charge could not be sustained. Rupa Singh himself spent over one thousand rupees on the court case, but without success; and he was still convinced that she had been murdered.

The news of events such as these spreads rapidly in the villages. They serve as reminders to young brides of the precariousness of their existence during their early years in their husbands' households. There is ample cause here for experiencing reality-based anxiety, which is all the more stressful because there is a strict taboo against a young woman voicing any complaints about the behaviour of her husband or any member of his family, but especially

against her uttering any criticism of her mother-in-law. Not surprisingly, many young wives develop neurotic or psychosomatic symptoms.

There is only one other figure in village society who provokes even more anxiety than a mother-in-law, and this is the witch, who is believed to prey upon young women and their children. Quite often the onset of a febrile illness, such as malaria, is attributed to the malevolence of a witch, and the afflicted woman becomes acutely anxious (as well as feeling physically ill) until the witch has been exorcised, or appeased by suitable offerings. The witch, like the mother-in-law, cannot be named nor openly accused. It seems likely that witches are the feared and hated substitutes in fantasy for the mothers-in-law. When a young woman is stricken by a witch, her husband's family, including her mother-in-law, rally round her as they take her to a temple or shrine, or summon a local exorcist to confirm the witch's activity and thwart her intentions. In this context the young woman (an incomer to her husband's village) may experience for the first time the comfort of knowing that her husband's family members are exerting themselves in order to protect her. In this way witches become the scapegoats for angry feelings which a young woman has harboured towards her new kinsfolk, and elicit demonstrations of positive concern for the afflicted one. To be afflicted by a witch can thus accelerate the young bride's incorporation into her husband's extended family. When her children, in turn, are believed to be witch-struck these are the occasions for renewed demonstrations of support.

Grown youths and men are not attacked by witches, but are frequently believed to suffer from the action of ghosts, demons or sorcerers. They turn to priests, Bhopas and knowers of powerful charms for supernatural protection, and their traditional healers are usually successful in at least relieving the anxiety which attends any prolonged illness in this community.

In another chapter, a description has been given of family feuds which have left a legacy of hostility, bitterness and tension – sometimes lasting for years. The most notable of these have been the quarrels over Hira Singh's inheritance, the alienation of Nathu Singh from his father Dalla Singh and the disruption of the village into rival camps when Hira Singh's mother Dhapubai was killed for a witch. I witnessed these disputes and the lasting ill-feeling to which they gave rise; but I was also able to see their abatement over the years, and the return of their participants into the single community which embraces all the citizens of Sujarupa. The village panchayat plays a valuable part in relieving interpersonal tensions because when differences arise between individuals or groups it provides the setting in which these differences can be ventilated and eventually resolved. This is a contribution to sustaining mental health in its small community. Like other panchayats it has sometimes faltered and sometimes failed in its task of reconciliation; but that it serves its social purpose is demonstrated by the fact that the village, although substantially larger than in 1950, is still, in 1981, a single extended family – and one in which a spirit of family solidarity still prevails.

10

Two Contrasting Villages in Udaipur District

Before embarking on a review of Sujarupa as it was in 1950 and as it has changed during the subsequent thirty-one years I should like briefly to describe two other villages in which I lived throughout 1951 and during the first three months of 1952, respectively. At this time the characteristics of the Rawats of Sujarupa were fresh in my mind, and they contrasted sharply with those of the next two communities which I studied.

The first of these was Fatehpura, in which I lived, with brief interruptions, throughout 1951. This was the seat of a feudal lord, one of the sixteen senior nobles at the court of the Maharana of Udaipur. The large village, with a population of 2417 distributed among thirty-eight castes, had been dominated for centuries by the palace of the Raj Rana (a title conferred upon an ancestor of the present lord by Rana Partab, the hero of Rajput resistance against the Moghul armies, when this warrior saved Rana Partab's life in the battle of Haldi Ghat, at the cost of his own).

For four centuries, the palace had been thronged with the Raj Rana's two hundred servants, his private army, his thirty horses and two elephants and a constant coming and going of supplicants. It included a law-court, an Ayurvedic dispensary and a small school. Outside the palace walls a considerable bazaar had come into being serving the villagers who came from some sixty villages from which the Raj Rana drew his revenues; because of the bazaar the most numerous caste was that of the *Banias* (merchants) numbering 578.

Under pressure from the democratic Congress government of newly independent India, the more than five hundred princes and maharajahs in 1948 surrendered their ancient feudal rights and functions in exchange for an annual pension which was at first generous but later dwindled and finally ceased altogether. This was an abrupt upheaval both for the princes and for their subjects. At a stroke, the former lost their roles as revenue collectors, law-enforcers and feudal overlords. For centuries, when a nobleman went abroad riding on horseback, on an elephant or in his car, his subjects lined the roads and bowed deeply as he passed, calling out 'Kaman, Andata' (Hail, Giver of Grain) but already this custom had begun to lapse. A number of the

young men simply stared at him, without making an obeisance – conduct which three years earlier would have earned them a summary beating at the hands of the ruler's retainers.

This was a time of confusion and reappraisal, as the elected village panchayat assumed responsibility for local administration and the villagers gradually learned where were the new seats of power and who were the new men from whom favours had to be sought. At this early stage, however, the intricate relationships between members of the several castes (each with their traditional employment) and the families for whom they performed services, and were rewarded in kind, continued unchanged. It was the former rulers who suffered the rudest shock, together with many of the retainers whose role in the palace had ceased to exist.

In Fatehpura, it took some years before the citizens fully realized that the Raj Rana was no longer a figure of commanding power. Elsewhere in India, Congress supporters had been educating villagers as well as townspeople about the new political organizations which would come into being after Independence; but in Fatehpura, as in many other princely states, such propaganda was firmly suppressed, so the public was not prepared for the new regime. It was remarkable, however, that the first nationwide state and national elections, which took place during 1951, were conducted with a high degree of more or less informed participation. Because of the low rate of literacy, the candidates were indentified by pictorial symbols, such as a cow, a spinning-wheel or a hand.

There were, inevitably, some misunderstandings. In the state of Jodhpur their popular young maharajah was one of the first of the former rulers to enter politics, standing for election as a member of the conservative Ram Raj Party. He was opposed by a Congress supporter and by a Communist (described by the local people as 'the red flag wallah' because they found his expositions of Marxism unintelligible). On polling day, the maharajah was asked by newspapermen whether he had voted for himself. He replied: 'Oh no, that would be unsporting – and I certainly wasn't going to vote for Congress – so I gave my vote to the Communist.' He meant this as a joke – as expected the maharajah won easily with the Congress candidate well behind and the Communist nowhere. Unfortunately, he was killed in a flying accident immediately after the election. The Congress Party felt sure that their man would win the subsequent by-election. However, the citizens reminded each other that the maharajah had voted for 'the red flag wallah', and so they followed his example and the Communist, to his surprise, found himself elected by a large majority.

In Fatehpura I listened to a number of electioneering speeches and was impressed by the candidates' efforts to educate their electorate about the meaning of democratic participation, as well as pleading their own cause.

In subsequent visits to that village I have found the palace empty, and

falling into decay, and the bazaar still active, although less busy than when the Raj Rana's rule prevailed; but two large new schools were pointed out to me as evidence that local politicians were not neglecting Fatehpura.

I have to confess that the high-caste Hindus who were the focus of my study could be rather dull company at times because they seemed to be 'cabined, cribbed and confined' by their many religious observances. It was a pleasure to spend some evenings with the Raj Rana, drinking a strong 'country brandy' and discussing contemporary politics and the usurpation of Rajputs former rights. At that time the Raj Rana was in two minds, whether to enter politics by becoming active in the new, conservative Ram Raj Party, or to renounce politics altogether and devote all his energies to meditation and other spiritual exercise.

The high-caste Hindus shared a cultural bias towards self-restraint, bordering upon asceticism. They observed many taboos against succumbing to pleasure in eating, drinking spirits or indulging in sex. Their stress on keeping up the appearance of being extremely devout often reminded me of the heyday of Victorian piety in Britain.

This conspicuous piety was rudely interrupted one week in the autumn of 1951 by the arrival of a band of musicians and players. These were Bhils from the Aravalis, who performed short satirical dramas (including some parodies of British businessmen being ambushed, robbed and ridiculed when they ventured into the Bhils' mountain territories). They also drank copiously, laughed boisterously and let their women join in dancing with the men – all of which was shocking behaviour to a caste Hindu. It quickened my interest in spending some time in an unspoilt Bhil village.

In Fatehpura I made myself available to all my informants as their family doctor and was in fact consulted about sicknesses in the households of each of them. I also saw some patients every day in my upstairs workroom in a house in the village bazaar. Here, even more than in Sujarupa, illnesses of women and young children were frequently attributed to the evil magic of a witch. Relatives took these patients to the Bhopa of the deity specially associated with their caste, and were advised how to appease the witch. In addition, once a year there was a three-day sacred festival outside the shrine of Vijayshan-mata, the most powerful mother-goddess in the village, who was worshipped by members of all the Hindu castes. In October, 1951, during the third night of this worship, I saw her principal Bhopa become possessed by the goddess and speak with her voice. While he was in trance, three young women were brought before him in turn and the witch who was believed to have afflicted them was summoned by the goddess. At first the witch would not comply, but soon each one submitted to this demand; her victim entered into a trance and became possessed by the witch. There followed a heated dialogue between the goddess and the witch, in the course of which the latter was resoundingly beaten with a bundle of sacred peacock's feathers. This led to her capitulating and promising to obey the goddess's command to stop harassing her victim.

The 'patient' would then awake from her trance and would be led aside to recover from her ordeal. I talked to each of these three in turn and although they felt exhausted they explained to me that the pain of the beating was not felt by them, but by the witches who had entered into their bodies for a time. They now felt confident that they were no longer in danger of being killed by witch-possession because the goddess would protect them.

If Fatehpura seemed to be much concerned about the prevalence of witches, this was even more the case in my next village.

After Fatehpura I spent the first three months of 1952 in Khajuria, a village deep in the ranges of the Aravali hills, in south-western Udaipur, the heart of the Bhil country. The Bhils are a tribal people, scattered widely in the villages of southern Rajasthan, Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. Where they are found in villages of the plains they are wretchedly poor, often employed for a pittance as day labourers and regarded as being on a par with the untouchables. In their own Aravali heartland, however, they are quite different. Here, they are warriors and brigands, frequently raiding villages of the plains when they are not engaged in their own inter-village feuds.

Before selecting this village I consulted a retired Indian Army Officer, Major Maxwell, living in Udaipur. He had formerly been the commander of the Bhil Corps. After studying an ordnance survey map of the Aravali hill ranges he recommended me to stay in the hamlet called Khajuria because to his knowledge there were nineteen uncaught murderers living in its vicinity. However, he qualified this statement by explaining that they were not really murderers because they had killed of necessity, during a blood feud. It was evident that as a result of living with – and sometimes fighting against – the Bhils, Major Maxwell had come to respect, though not to approve, many of their customs.

These Bhils are armed with swords and bows and arrows, and they have the unusual custom that every adult male is expected to carry a weapon and a flute. After warfare and hunting, their favourite occupations are music, song and dance. Their womenfolk are untrammelled by purdah, and enter with zest into the hazardous sport of eloping with a lover from another village; this provokes a blood feud which continues until the headmen of the villages concerned persuade the aggrieved husband to accept a settlement in cattle and goats, after which they eat opium together and the feud comes to an end.

These hill-dwelling Bhils have served over the centuries as mercenaries in the army of the Maharana of Udaipur, whose royal crest has, as its supporters, a Rajput warrior on one side and a Bhil on the other.

Raiding each other's villages to steal cattle is another provocation for a feud. During my three months' stay in one of their hill villages I heard the war drum beaten seven times, as a signal to stand to arms, although only one of these alarms resulted in the successful theft of a young heifer. When camel-caravans of merchandise pass through their territory, travelling between Udaipur and Jodhpur states, the Bhils exact *agwa*, a form of

Danegeld, in return for which they undertake to protect the caravan during its passage through the hills.

While I was in their territory I saw a special party of election officials constructing rustic election booths so that the Bhils could also participate (although a few weeks later than the rest of the country) in the general elections. A necessary precaution was insisted upon, in order to avoid bloodshed: this was that voters must relinquish their weapons a quarter of a mile away from the polling booths.

The Bhils worship local gods and goddesses known only to themselves, but they also invoke the name of Bhagwan, and they also like to bring from a village near Nathdwara painted images made of baked clay representing the Hindu gods Dharm-Raj, Kala-Nag (the cobra), Bhairav and one or other form of Mataji. Having brought them to their village, however, they leave them exposed to weather and revere them only on one night in the year, when a session of song and worship is held.

I saw one shrine of a Bhil goddess to whom it was their custom to offer a small horse made of baked clay before setting out on a raid, and counted forty such offerings, some old and broken but several quite new.

They describe three sources of supernatural affliction which can lead to sickness and death. One of these is the demon-goddess called Sikotri, with her servant called Vir who delivers her deadly magic to its victim; only a very clever *devalo* (magic healer) can save his life. A majority of households keep images of Sikotri, who is referred to as the Protector. The others keep instead an image of Kamria-path, a fierce and jealous male god, who demands regular worship with singing and dancing, and will make people ill if his worship is neglected.

The Bhils also firmly believe in female witches; in fact they believe that every woman is likely to be inducted into the company of witches if she lives long enough. Women who are suspected of practising witchcraft, bringing sickness upon their victims, are sometimes submitted to the ordeal of having their ankles tied with rope and then being swung, head down, from the branch of a tall tree in the hope that they will confess to having practised witchcraft and promise to desist. If this swinging does not have the desired effect, it is repeated after applying a paste of chopped red chillies to the unfortunate woman's vagina. This preoccupation with the demonic attributes of older women is the more remarkable because young Bhil men and women, including husbands and wives, appear to enjoy each other's company unashamedly, unconstrained by the Hindu taboo which prohibits any public display of affection between the sexes.

The experience of living in these three villages (all within the state of Udaipur) in quick succession brought home to me the marked differences between these small communities. Of the three, Sujarupa was the most cohesive, still having some of the attributes of a large extended family. Its old men tended to live in the past, recalling their ancestors' prowess in warfare

and in looting lowland villages or travelling caravans of merchandise, but their young men were more intent on making a success of cultivating their fields by day and adding to the repute of their hamlet for ardent sessions of bhakti by night. Fatehpura, in contrast, had been dominated for at least four centuries by the Rajput aristocrat who collected a revenue of more than 100,000 rupees from sixty villages which lay within his territory. During 1951 (the year of the first nationwide election) Fatehpura's citizens were still at a loss to know how to gain access to the local government agents who now controlled many aspects of their lives. In India things always get done more quickly if one can establish a personal rapport with the administrator concerned. During this period of uncertainty many in this village seemed to retreat into the haven of their religion, appealing to their domestic god or goddess to see them safely through. Meanwhile, the older generation – especially the old women – practised religious rituals with great regularity in the hope of obtaining spiritual if not material relief from their anxieties.

Living with the Bhils was of particular interest because their way of life seemed to be very similar to that of the ancestors of the Rawats of Sujarupa – although the former made no claims to being descendants of Rajput heroes. On the contrary, they cherished their independent existence and their participation with the Rajputs of Udaipur in many battles during past centuries. The Rawats could be seen more clearly (in the light of the Bhils' retention of warfare and brigandry, strong drink and sexual adventures) as having moved quite a long way already in their renunciation of tribal values as they progressively modelled themselves on the behaviour of high-caste Hindus.

The literature on the impact on village life of rapid changes in technology has been dominated by the studies of industrialization, both in the Western world and more recently in the developing countries. Emile Durkheim, the pioneer sociologist, contrasted the interdependence of villagers with the separateness caused by the division of labour which accompanied the industrial revolution. He contrasted the villagers' solidarity, their acceptance of mutual obligations and their adherence to the values of their community with the personal isolation, the loss of group support in times of trouble and above all the *anomie*, or loss of shared values, which were the usual experience of incomers to the city. In Indian cities, however, things were different. Many villagers made a practice of joining already existing groups of men of their own caste and drawn from their own area. These small close-knit communities provided a sense of kinship in the crowded slums of the factory workers. Bhajan-singing was a cherished activity among these ex-villagers. They would invite bhagats, men well versed in devotional worship, to give them instruction. It was in these late evening sessions of ardent hymn-singing that they learned a repertoire of bhajans which they would later sing when they returned home. Because they lived in kinship groups and shared the same work and social life – such as it was – they did not suffer isolation and anomie.

The numerous Rawats who served for some years in the army learned to participate in similar bhajan-sessions with fellow-soldiers drawn from different castes and different parts of India. They were also given instruction in reading and writing to make good their lack of schooling. These temporary emigrants brought a fervour for devotional worship back with them when they returned to their homes. Unlike what happened in Europe, a spell in city slums or some years in the army were both positively civilizing experiences. In Sujarupa, Devi Singh, Nathu Singh and Samp Singh learned their bhajans in Ahmedabad, while Hira Singh and Rup Singh were among those who learned their hymns in the army.

In Fatehpura, with its numerous caste groups, there are many different temples but no single all-embracing cult. The Bhils of Khajuria had a vigorous tradition of song, both sacred and profane. They sang in worship of their own gods and goddesses of the jungle more often than to Hindu deities; they had assimilated few Hindu religious practices in spite of living as their near neighbours for centuries. Sujarupa was therefore the only one of these villages in which bhakti had come to play an important unifying role.

II

A Look Before and After

Most Westerners who have kept in touch with village communities of the Third World over a span of years seem to have developed an emotional bond with the community as a whole and with some of its members in particular. This has been acknowledged explicitly in writings of the Wisers, of Margaret Mead and of Richard Critchfield (see Appendix 1), all of whom included accounts of their own feelings as part of their observations in the field.

My prolonged involvement with Sujarupa has also had an emotional dimension which was heightened in 1951 during the tense months which followed the beating and subsequent death of Dhapu, the supposed witch. Both sides in this quarrel looked to me for help, not so much in order to discredit their opponents as to seek some way to escape from the judicial process which disturbed the whole community. They were anxious to let their own panchayat make its judgement and call upon the offending parties to make amends to Dhapu's family; but since the magistrate's court had become involved, its procedures had to run their course. Within a few weeks of the fatal event the initial bitter feelings were giving place to a desire to restore good relations between the divided groups of kinsmen. By the end of 1951, when only Rama Singh still remained in prison, the contestants were no longer quarrelling: I could even sense a feeling of relief, shared by both parties, that Dhapu, whom they had so firmly believed to be a witch, was no longer able to 'devour the livers' of their young women and children.

Although Devi Singh had not been actively involved in the beating he, like the great majority of the villagers – men and women alike – had no doubts about Dhapu's having practised witchcraft. The same was probably true of her son Hira Singh whose reproach against his fellows was not that they had denounced and threatened her, but that they had beaten her too severely and caused her death. During the ensuing year I remained on good terms with both sides because I listened to both parties in the dispute; and when I spoke to the magistrate I expressed my concern for the village as a whole and did not take sides with either group.

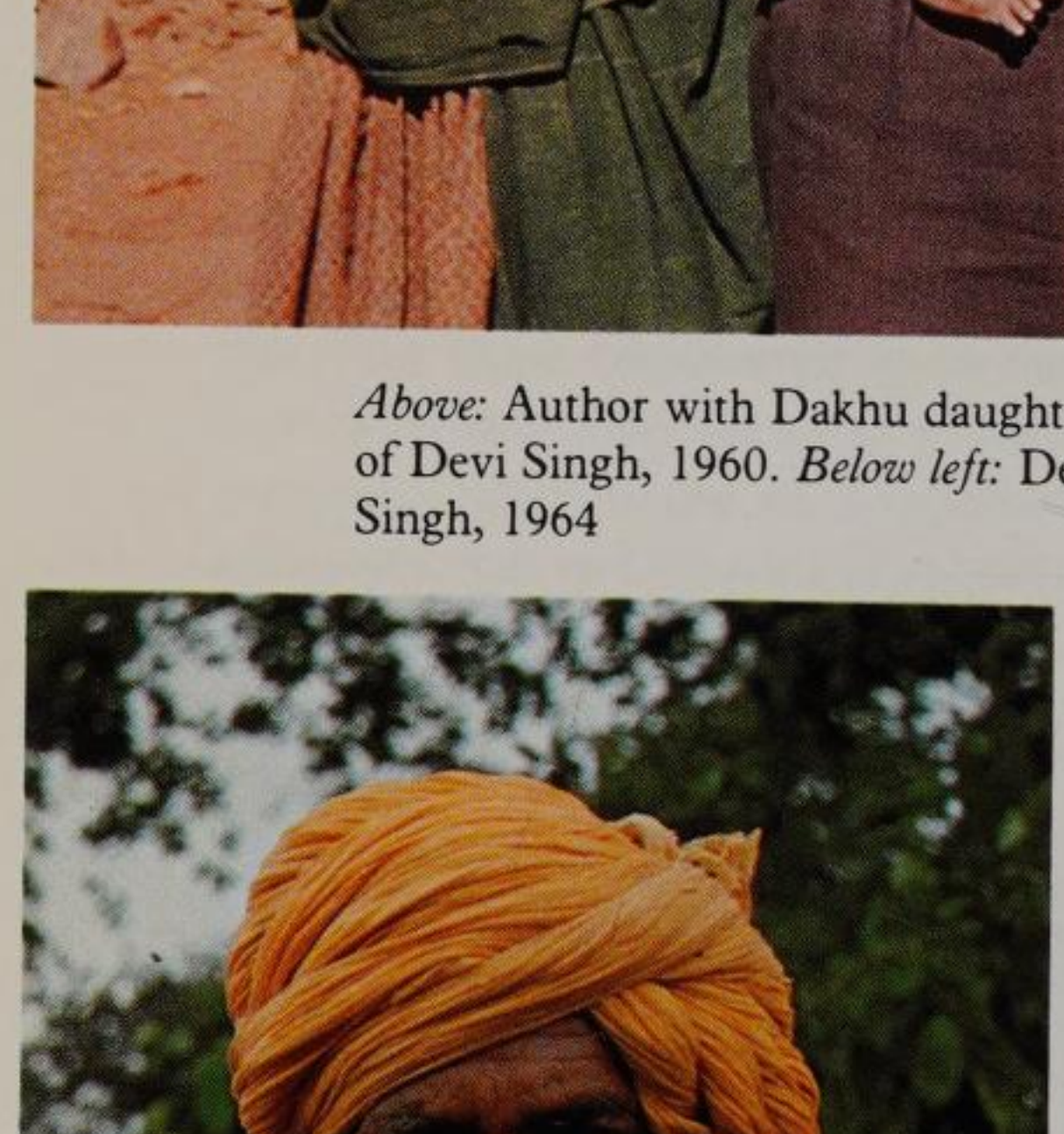
My friendship with Devi Singh remained unbroken both in that year of his kinsmen's trial and imprisonment and in the following years. At long intervals

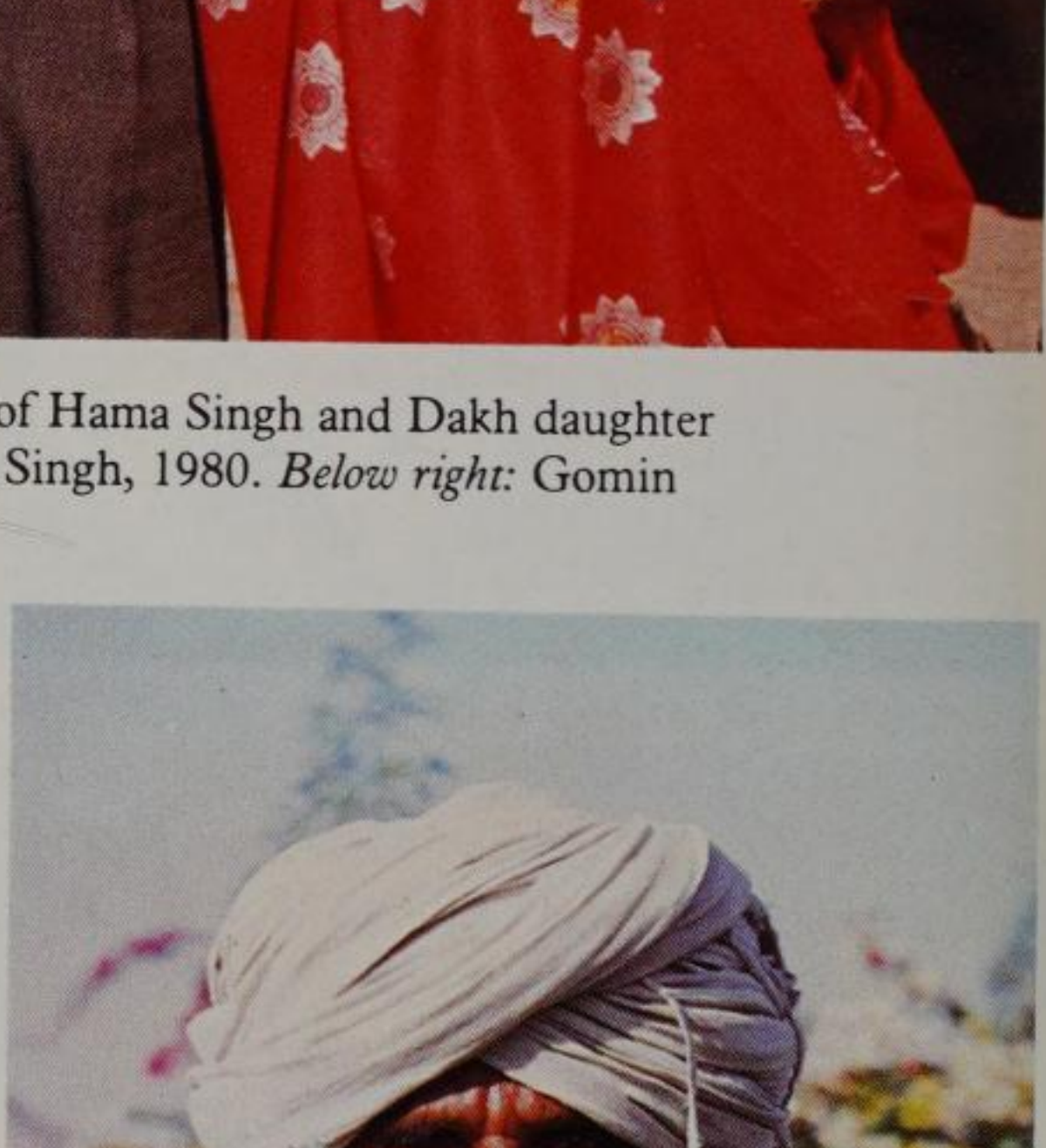
Above: Bridegroom Moti Singh and his *barat,* an escort of kinsmen approach the bride's home, 1950.

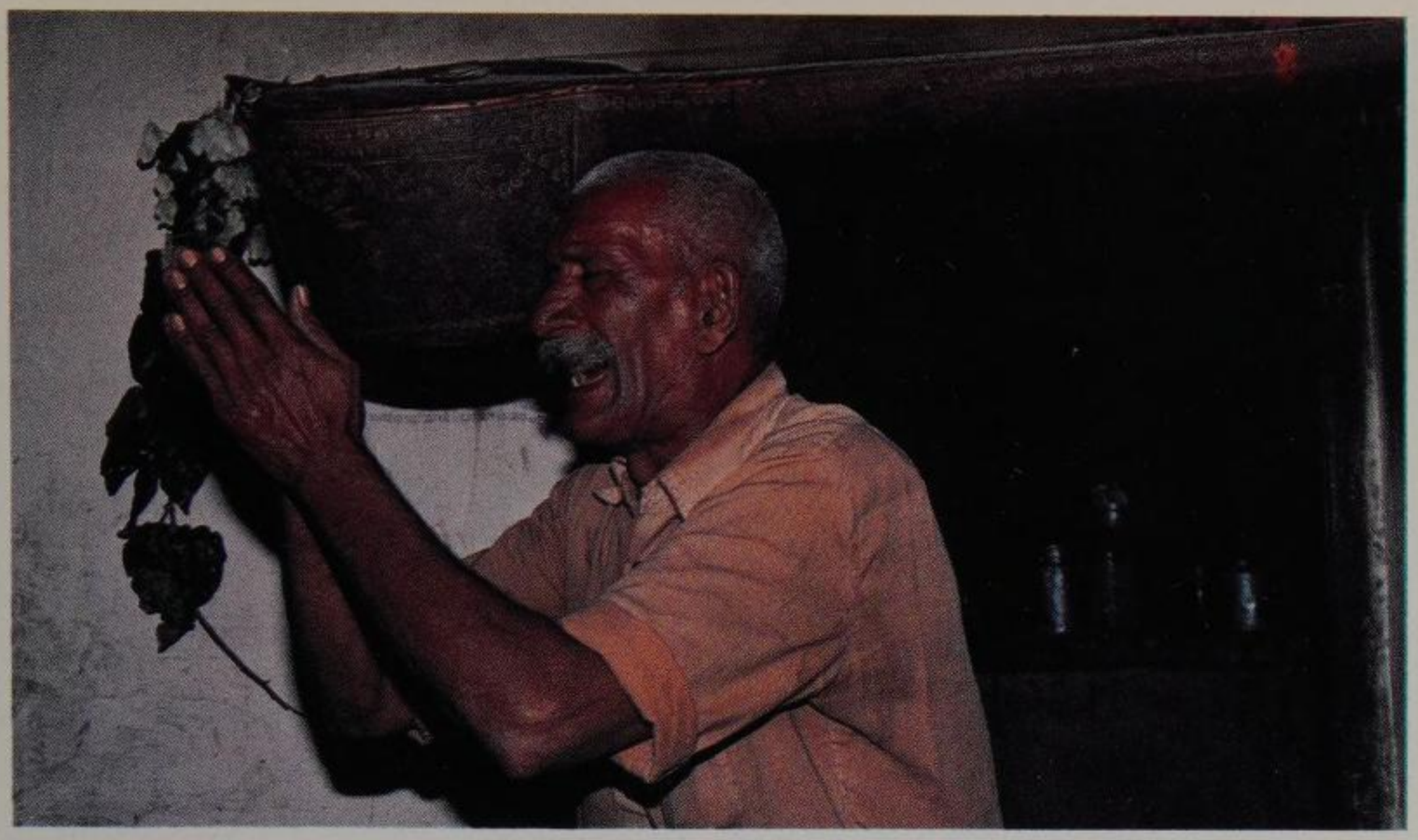
Left: Moti Singh, his father Hama Singh and uncle Pitha Singh, 1950.

Below: Departure of Dakhu from Sujarupa after her wedding, 1950

Above: Author with Dakhu daughter of Hama Singh and Dakh daughter of Devi Singh, 1960. *Below left:* Devi Singh, 1980. *Below right:* Gomin Singh, 1964

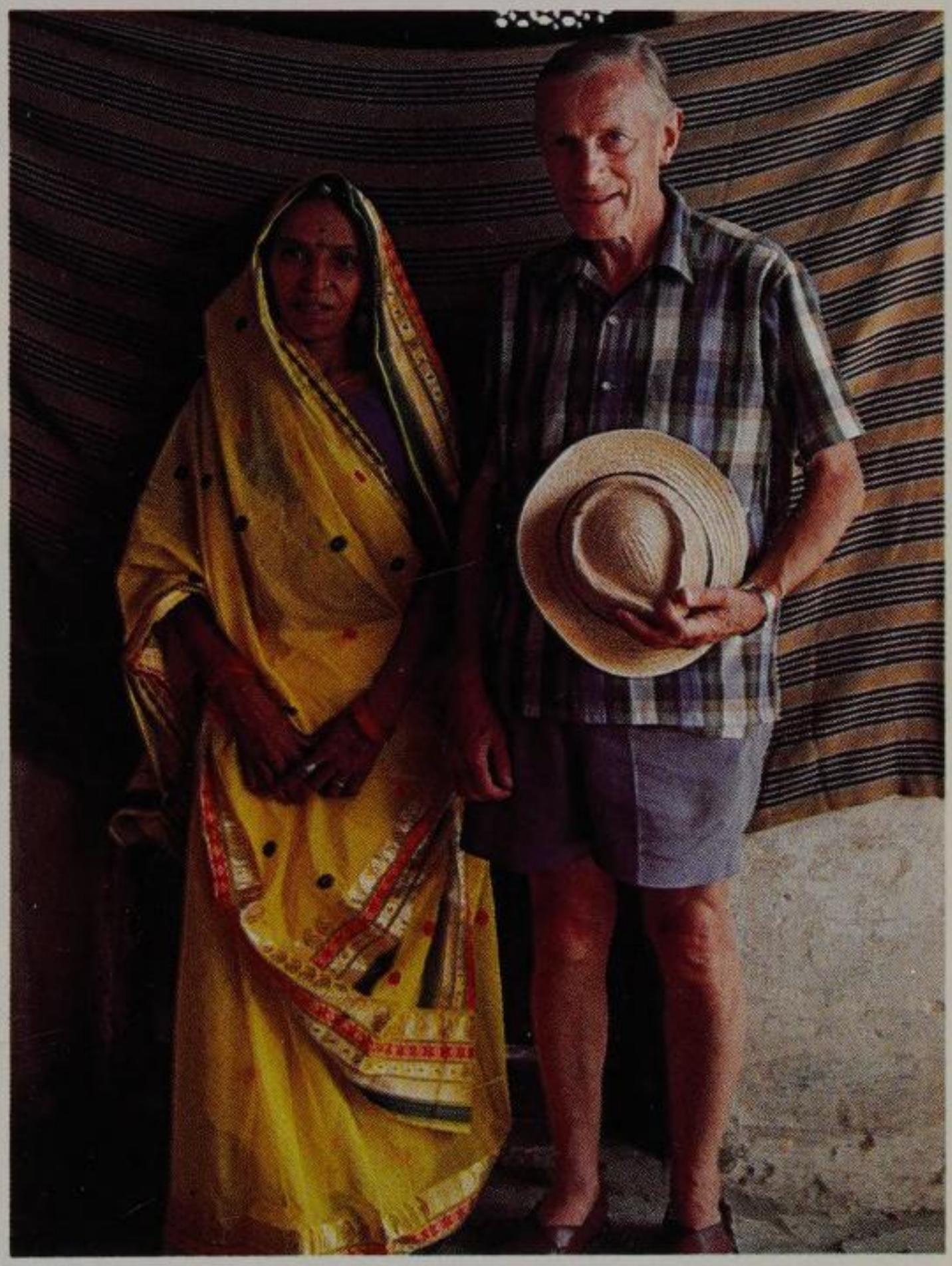






Devi Singh carried away during a bhajan-singing, 1980

Dhaku/Hama, 1980



Author and Dhaku, wife of Devi Singh, 1981

Nathu Singh at morning prayer, 1980

A stick dance during Holi festival. Laxman Singh at left, with red turban, 1981

I used to receive letters bearing his signature but written for him in Hindi or in Roman Urdu, which I found easier to read. He always gave me news about the rains and the crops and asked when I would visit them again. Our mutual friend Prem Chand wrote two or three times a year (in Roman Urdu) to give me news of the village.

During the next thirty years Devi Singh's three daughters and two sons and my daughter and two boys grew up in parallel, although 5000 miles apart. In 1973, however, while I was working in New Delhi for the World Health Organization all three of my children (now aged between seventeen and twenty-two) came to visit me and to explore some parts of India. All three visited Sujarupa, and both the eldest (Susy) and Jamie, the youngest, did so after having learned to converse in Hindustani. At different times, these two stayed for three weeks as guests of Devi Singh. Their brother Mungo's only visit was cut short by an acute attack of dysentery, but not before he, like the others, had become attracted by this rugged little hamlet on the fringe of the Aravali hills, and by its welcoming though bluntly-spoken inhabitants. They were made the more welcome because they had learned how to salute my two 'sisters' with the respectful greetings due to one's aunts. This led to their acceptance as members of my 'sisters' ' families.

Two other visitors brought me news of the village between my own irregularly spaced visits. One was the Scottish missionary, Hugh Baikie, who had helped me in my search for a community of Rajput farmers. He stayed in Todgarh, for two days in March, 1950, and again in June, and became acquainted with Devi Singh. During the next eight years, whenever his travels brought him near Sujarupa he would pause for a while to talk with Devi Singh and other villagers, and would then pass on their news and greetings to me.

The other visitor, also a Scot from Edinburgh, found her way to the village in August, 1969. This was Sandra Grant, a final-year student of medicine at Edinburgh University, who had been one of my pupils there. I had known her as a rather militant radical during the student unrest of 1968, so I was interested to learn that she was going to spend some months in India gaining practical experience in hospital and community medicine in Ahmedabad. I urged her to make a detour, on her return journey, in order to spend a few days in Sujarupa. She did so, and was much impressed by the experience. On the one hand, she was appalled by the physical squalor, and the abundance of communicable disease, but on the other she found the village community profoundly different from the slum-dwellers whom she had met in Ahmedabad. The Rawats might be equally poor, but they were men and women of spirit, with pride in their clan, and in their legendary ancestry. Their work was hard, but it was carried out in beautiful surroundings, and there were aspects of their small society which she found aesthetically and emotionally admirable. With some reluctance, she told me that it alarmed her to think that if, in the process of modernization, these 'backward' villagers were taught how to

improve their material condition – and little else – they might lose elements of great value in their oral culture and their traditional values. Unlike so many of the city-dwellers, these Rawats still relished being their own masters – but how long would this continue? These reactions even threatened Dr Grant's hitherto firmly socialist ideas about the priorities in village development in a country like India. However, as a doctor and a feminist, she placed high on this list their needs for preventive medicine, and for better education and a more emancipated role for their womenfolk (who had not yet even discovered how unfairly they are treated).

I recognized in these visitors' spontaneous liking for Sujarupa and its inhabitants an echo of my own feelings about the village, which have been a blend of regard for their way of life and impatience at their unwillingness to make some changes which could only be to their advantage. They have been slow to recognize the value of literacy and actively discourage it in their women; and their resistance to new ideas in health care has been responsible for many preventable deaths, especially among their children. On the positive side, they have been quick to learn new techniques in agriculture, and their increasing involvement in bhakti (which as recently as 1950 was treated with derision by the older Rawats of this area) has altered the character and the social status of the whole village community.

As a doctor, I have been especially interested in the failure of Western medicine to gain acceptance among these reasonably intelligent farmers; and as an anthropologist I have been struck by the contrast between the Rawats' relative failure in their attempt to achieve recognition as Chauhan Rajputs and their success in acquiring high local esteem as devotees of bhakti. These two themes, one of health and the other of social status, deserve further consideration because the former illustrates the obstacles which have to be overcome before the nation's plans to improve rural health standards can be realized, while the latter shows an example of successful change in a community's self-image as well as in its standing in the surrounding area. Together, they demonstrate the task before a typical rural community in its slow progress towards improving its members' physical and mental health.

Progress and Failures in Rural Health Care

During the years 1950-52 the American anthropologist McKim Marriott and I had been studying villages in different regions of northern India (he in the Aligarh district of Uttar Pradesh and I in the state of Udaipur) without being aware of each other's work. We were both invited by Benjamin Dean Paul to contribute to the volume of papers on health planning in developing countries, entitled *Health, Culture and Community*, which he edited in 1955. My contribution, 'Medicine and Faith in Rural Rajasthan', drew upon my observations in Sujarupa in 1950 and in the larger, multi-caste village of Fatehpura, in which I worked throughout 1951. Marriott's chapter, 'Western

Medicine in a Village in Northern India', was based upon the large Uttar Pradesh village which he named Kishan Garhi. We both addressed the same question: why was Western medicine, even where it was fairly readily accessible, so little trusted and so little used by 'our' villagers?

We noted the wide range of folk-medicines employed to treat minor disorders; most households had a small store of dried roots or medicinal leaves which they had either gathered in the jungle or bought from an itinerant herbalist. If these medicines did not relieve the sick person, his family would seek help from one or more of several sources. Marriott and I were struck by certain marked differences in the approach to treatment here, as compared with that in our respective countries. In India, a sick person never consulted a healer alone, but always with several members of his family who all discussed the patient's illness and his behaviour with complete disregard for his personal privacy. This was not resented, but was seen by the patient as evidence of their wish to help him.

We found that not one but several kinds of healers would be consulted at the same time, and their various remedies taken simultaneously. There were many local men who had acquired particular skills such as bonesetting, the cure of scorpion stings, or extraction of thorns from the feet. None of these were accorded any elevated status because of their practical skills; the rewards for their services were quite small and they were paid only after the patient had recovered.

A smaller number of men belonging to various castes were known to possess powerful healing charms. They were treated with some respect because the perfecting of their charms was known to be a prolonged and sometimes dangerous task. A third category were the practitioners of what Marriott terms Sacerdotal Medicine, practised by priests (all of whom, in Kishan Garhi, were Brahmins). The priests prescribed healing rituals for illnesses which were attributed to religious laxity. They also gave astrological advice on how to avoid illness and other misfortunes.

In Sujarupa there were no Brahmins; but the villagers frequently consulted the priests of local temples and shrines in cases of life-threatening illness, and received advice and reassurance from the god or goddess speaking through the person of the priest in trance. These Bhopas, as they were called, were accorded respect because of their intimate contact with the supernatural powers; they did not ask for payment, but were rewarded with generous offerings to the gods whom they served.

In the eyes of the villagers, Western doctors, nurses and pharmacists fell into the category of laymen who had acquired certain technical skills, but who lacked the inspiring aura of those who knew magical charms or could speak with divine authority. The first premise of village beliefs about ill-health was (and still is) that supernatural forces are responsible for every serious accident, disease or injury. They look to their healers for the indentification of the ghost, demon, sorcerer, witch or local deity which has been at work,

and for guidance about what must be done to counteract the supernatural agency. The healers to whom they turn for help are people whom they already know by repute, if not in person; above all, they share the same beliefs about the 'real' cause of illness and misfortune and also the Ayurvedic concept of the need to keep the three humours of the body in harmony by maintaining a balance between 'hot' and 'cold' foods in their diet.

Here we have the crux of the matter: mutual misunderstanding is bound to arise between rural patients who believe in the supernatural cause of illness and doctors trained in scientific medicine, unless the doctor takes pains to show that he respects his patient's understanding of illness while tactfully indicating that his own approach is different but can yield good results.

The villagers are vaguely aware that doctors employ new, powerful (and often expensive) medicines, frequently given by injection. These drugs can be seen in the medicine shops which have sprung up in every small town and in many large villages; but whom can they trust to advise them correctly about these drugs? The shopkeeper, intent on making money? Or the doctor, who admits to knowing so little about the supernatural causes of illness? Or the traditional healers who fear that their own time-honoured remedies are being challenged?

There have been a number of outstandingly successful examples of rural health care projects led by dedicated doctors – notably the community health programme in Jamkhed, Maharashtra, led by Dr and Mrs (also Dr) Arole, and those associated with the Departments of Community and Preventive Medicine of the Post-Graduate Institute in Chandigarh, the All-India Institute for Medical Sciences in New Delhi, and the Christian Medical Colleges of Ludhiana, Vellore and Bangalore among many others – but these remain exemplary demonstrations of what can be done under good leadership, rather than typical examples of primary health care, applicable throughout the nation.

This is a time of great uncertainty in rural medicine in India, as indeed it has been all over the world for a good many years. The anthropologist Oscar Lewis (1955) gave a candid account of an attempt to set up a low-cost, government-sponsored health clinic in the Mexican village of Tepoztlan, in 1943. The villagers themselves declared that this was one of their most urgent needs and yet within three months it had proved a failure, overcome by the hostility of the local traditional healers, led by 'El Medico', a self-styled, self-taught 'doctor' who dominated medical practice in the community. In discussing the failure of this much-needed facility Lewis pointed out the importance of taking into account the 'men of power' in any small society. Unless they are willing to accept the innovation – and perhaps find in it a means of advancing their own interests – the venture will be doomed before it starts.

In Sujarupa, as in Tepoztlan, a readily accessible government health clinic has failed to gain acceptance among the villagers whom it was intended to

serve. We have discussed in a previous chapter how essential it is that an Indian patient should have implicit trust in his doctor, because only then can he have confidence in the doctor's advice and in his medications. All too often, doctors have blamed their rural patients for being ignorant, stubborn and resistant to change: but the fault has not been all on one side. Some doctors behave in a superior, indeed scornful, manner towards their rural patients and, by doing so, forfeit their confidence: there is no place in the villager's scheme of things for a doctor who dismisses his fears of ghosts, witches or sorcery as ignorant superstition. Beliefs which have existed for centuries cannot be lightly discarded. This failure to establish a good relationship between rural patients and medically trained personnel is one reason why Western medicine has made such slow progress in localities where it is particularly needed.

It was only in 1973 that the World Health Organization itself realized just how slow this progress had been. In that year, which marked WHO's twenty-fifth anniversary, a report was published of the achievements in primary health care in the developing countries – and the findings were far from complimentary (WHO, 1973). The report revealed that in many countries the health services were not keeping pace with the increase in population and that there was a widespread dissatisfaction with existing health services which were failing to meet the people's needs, and their expectations. In many countries the consumers felt that the health services and the personnel within them were progressing along an uncontrollable path of their own which might be satisfying to the health professions, but was not what was most wanted by the consumer.

This report undoubtedly played a part in bringing about a radical change in WHO's planning for basic health care in the Third World. While still insisting on health protection through improved hygiene, pure drinking water, better nutrition and immunization against childhood diseases, WHO began to urge its member countries to employ modestly trained health workers in much larger numbers – especially in rural areas. The tasks of these workers – themselves recruited from the villages – would be to spread simple health education, to recognize common illnesses and bring the sick to medical attention and then to supervise their aftercare.

It is interesting to note that this deployment of modestly trained rural health workers was the main recommendation of a Working Party of the Indian National Congress which, in 1938, drew up a plan for bringing modern health care within reach of India's villagers. With a farsightedness which was not widely shared at that time, the working party stated that it would be unrealistic to rely upon doctors to deliver primary care at the village level, for two reasons: (a) there were not enough doctors, nor would there be for many years; and (b) the doctors' skills should be employed as supervisors of the auxiliary workers, and in treating the more difficult cases at Primary Health Centres and district hospitals. The anonymous authors of this plan went on to

say: 'The huge task that faces us could never be solved on a routine or bureaucratic basis. Thus the cornerstone of the scheme we recommend is a health worker. The health worker will be one of the villagers themselves only somewhat better trained. He will not appear to the villagers as the alien imposer of a strange system but as one of their own kith and kin who desires to help them. These health workers should be given elementary training in practical community and personal hygiene, first aid and simple medical treatments.' (cited in Cassen, 1978, p. 205).

This plan anticipated by several years the modern Chinese concept of the 'barefoot doctors' and it was also in advance of current thinking in India. Consequently, it was ignored by the ruling British government of the day and apparently also forgotten by the Congress Party during the first three decades of India's independence.

It is noteworthy that the report was based on the assumption that India's villagers were eager to make use of Western medicine if only it were more readily accessible; but this was at that time (and still is today) only partly true. The late Dr D. M. MacKay of London's Ross Institute of Tropical Hygiene wrote a telling article in 1981 just before his death, entitled: 'Primary health care may be needed, but is it wanted?' In this paper he drew attention to many instances of Primary Health Centres and plantation dispensaries which are under-utilized by the populations they were intended to serve.

For decades, health planners in India, as in other countries, shared the mistaken idea that one had only to create Primary Health Centres and they would at once be fully used. As a result, successive plans for rural health care in India (starting with the Bhore Report of 1946) envisaged a nationwide network of Primary Health Centres (PHC), each staffed with several doctors (of both sexes) and an array of nurses and medical auxiliaries. Subsequent reviews found it necessary to extend the size of the populations to be catered for by each PHC from the original 40,000 to between 80,000 and 100,000. Even with the increase in size of the potential clientele, in many states the PHCs have remained under-utilized, because the villagers have remained unconvinced of the centres' ability to cure their afflictions.

The scepticism concerning Western medicine which McKim Marriot found prevalent in Kishan Garhi and I in Sujarupa, thirty years ago, has yet to be overcome in large sections of the rural population, particularly in the educationally backward states. (It had changed only a little in Sujarupa, by 1981, in that I now found three men who knew from experience that prolonged allopathic treatment can cure tuberculosis; for the rest, they still had little faith in Western-style doctors.)

This continuing failure to convince villagers about the efficacy of modern medicine has been criticized by social scientists – notably by doctor and anthropologist, Dr D. Banerji (1974) of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He has pointed out that from the founding of India's first College of Medicine, in 1835, the aims and course content, the basing of medical

education on large city hospitals, with an emphasis on relatively uncommon major diseases, and – not least – the inculcation of values in this and subsequent medical colleges in India were all based on the pattern of British medicine. Little attention was paid to the great differences between the health and social problems found in the East and in the West.

It required the detachment of a sociological observer to bring home the point that medical education in the formerly colonial countries was preparing doctors to meet the health needs of the highly developed countries, rather than those of their own country. Young Indian doctors have been taught to rely upon modern laboratory investigations of which only a few are available in rural health centres.

Perhaps even more important is the fact that they have implicitly been taught – if only by the example of doctors in their own families – to regard a relatively high income coupled with high social status as the just rewards for their years of study; but these rewards cannot be found in the rural areas where more than 80 per cent of their fellow citizens live. They graduate knowing that they are legally obliged to serve in rural areas for two years. This they do, but few among them perform this task with zeal, and fewer still with dedication to their rural patients.

Since 1975, national working parties reviewing the health services have included distinguished social scientists among their members, and it is noticeable that since that date a greater emphasis has been placed on economic and social factors in relation to health, and much more attention has been paid to the role of health workers drawn from the villagers themselves to take part in the treatment of common minor injuries and illnesses – on the lines advocated by the Congress Working Party's report of 1938. During the short regime of the Janata Government (1977-1980) an ambitious plan was launched to train first hundreds, then thousands and eventually some hundreds of thousands of these part-time village health workers, who would be supervised by more highly trained multipurpose health workers, and these in turn by the professional staff at the Primary Health Centres (Ghosal, 1978). The logistics of this undertaking were so formidable that within three years of its launching, it was judged more realistic to focus upon a number of defined population areas, and to monitor the effectiveness of the community health workers in these areas before attempting to deploy them on a nationwide scale.

Meanwhile, the collaboration between social sciences and medical planners continued. The latest of a series of their reports was entitled *Health for All: An Alternative Strategy* (edited by Dr V. Ramalingaswami, 1980). This report accepted as a first principle that plans to improve the nation's health will only succeed if they are integrated with other pressing needs in rural development. In the forefront, they stressed the need for health education to be made a part of basic education, both in schools and as part of the task of village health workers. Other social targets with a bearing on improving

public health included economic growth and fuller employment, emancipation of women, nationwide literacy, and active participation in local and State politics. In the medical sphere, the main targets would continue to be improvements in hygiene (including pure drinking water), nutrition and family planning. Medical care should be community-based rather than – as is still the case – biased towards large, overcrowded city hospitals. Priority should be given to the treatment of common disabling diseases at medical facilities within reach of the villages.

In order to succeed in realizing these sweeping changes the major emphasis in medical education should be placed on the training of very large numbers of community health volunteers, who would seek advice about problems beyond their scope from the multipurpose health workers who have had a more prolonged training. This would imply a reappraisal of the present domination of health education by the training of doctors and nurses who have contributed in their thousands to increasing the nation's brain drain. It can be anticipated that this report will meet strenuous opposition from the middle-class elite (doctors and patients alike) who have found the present unequal distribution of medical care to be to their advantage.

All this may seem to be far removed from the concerns of a hamlet like Sujarupa, with its under-utilized health clinic in nearby Todgarh, but Dr Ramalingaswami's *Alternative Strategy* has the merit of putting first things first when it gives priority to widespread medical education as the prerequisite for better rural health care. This does not mean that the common people will be urged to give up their age-old concepts of disease, but simply that they should be taught some basic ideas, such as the germ theory of infections, the importance of hygiene and the rationale of Western medicines. Their teachers, who will vary from being villagers themselves to doctors and nurses, will have to practise the Indian capacity for advancing new ideas without denigrating the older ideas which have served well in their day. At the same time, members of the health care staff, at all levels, will have to learn – and demonstrate in their practice – the importance of caring for their patients as an essential aspect of the task of curing them (as traditional medicine knows well, but modern medicine is in danger of forgetting).

Some of my medical colleagues have reacted with alarm at the prospect that in the coming years millions of rural patients will be treated for common ailments by health workers, at a modest level; but is it not better that they should receive such treatment than forego the remedies which are now readily available? Even a village worker can bring them relief, and in many cases cure their condition, and even a basic health worker can become as familiar as any doctor with the treatment of common local illnesses.

During my own visits to Sujarupa and other villages between 1978 and 1981 I took with me a manual entitled 'Where there is no doctor', by the medical anthropologist, David Werner (1977). This a compendium of illnesses commonly found in tropical countries. They are described in clear language, free

of medical jargon and the text is copiously illustrated with drawings. Werner's book is one of a large number of manuals of instruction for basic health workers which have been produced in the native languages of many developing countries, often with the help of WHO. One of its merits is that it includes many simple remedies whose ingredients can be found in most countries as well as indicating up-to-date antibiotics where these are the best (or only) remedy for some serious diseases. The manual was first published in Spanish, with recognizably Latin-American illustrations. A Hindi translation has already been prepared, with illustrations of Indian rural scenes and people. It will become a useful aid in training village workers and is already – as I can testify from experience – an invaluable reference book in village medical practice.

As the *Alternative Strategy* reports have made clear, modern medicine will not become generally accepted by villagers unless someone whom they trust takes the trouble to explain how illness affects the body, and how medicines can cure the illness. Only then will they be prepared to give Western medicines a fair trial – and, even then, only if they experience fairly speedy relief will they become convinced. Several years may pass before medical education gets under way on a national scale, but there is already a large and increasing number of advisers who are sufficiently highly motivated to inform villagers, in their own idiom, about modern medications: these are, of course, the proprietors of the pharmacies (or medicine shops) which proliferate in small towns all over India. There is one such shop in Todgarh, which carries a remarkable array of antibiotics and modern pharmaceuticals. Shopkeepers like these are contributing to public education, of a sort, about these medicines, but it cannot be said that all of them convey a sense of dedication to their clients' welfare. The paradox remains unresolved: the means of modern healing are becoming increasingly accessible to the villages, but a barrier of ignorance and mistrust still prevents the villagers from benefiting as they might from these new medicines. One other hope still remains – that many young men may follow the example of Laxman Singh and learn the use of a number of medicines through sharing experiences with their fellows while working in a large city, and subsequently bring home an array of modern medicines with whose use they have become familiar.

WHO's target of 'Health for All by the Year 2000' may prove unattainable, but it points in the right direction. Until very recent years, serious malnutrition and preventable early deaths were inescapable features of life in the poor countries of the world. The Green Revolution has raised hopes that gross inequalities of diet can be reduced more speedily than was thought possible only a few years ago: this promotes hygiene, health care and family planning to the highest priority. Since modern medicine has made such slow progress in countries like India during the past hundred years it would be unrealistic to expect a sudden transformation in the villagers' attitudes; but it is quite conceivable that recent advances in molecular biology, in gene

manipulation or in some unexpected field may produce new medications as dramatic in their improved healing powers as were the first antibiotics in their day – but that is speculation.

I hasten to add that I have no magical expectations of therapeutic breakthroughs in the next generation. As a psychiatrist (as well as a village doctor), I am well aware that as soon as the diseases responsible for premature death and preventable disability (among which I include the major mental illnesses) have been brought under control, people all over the world will raise the level of their expectations and seek relief from their neurotic and psychosomatic disorders. Until now, beneficent magic and divine intervention mediated by priests, exorcists and knowers of charms have been the commonest forms of psychic healing in the countries of the Third World – and they will still be the first resort of the emotionally disturbed, well into the next millennium. In this field of healing, medicine has a minor part to play: psychotropic drugs can relieve many forms of mental distress but patients who seek more lasting relief will continue – and rightly so – to consult the experts in dealing with 'problems of living'. These include some quacks and charlatans who exploit their patients' gullibility, but the majority of traditional healers are devout believers in the supernatural who invite their supplicants to share their beliefs and the solace which they impart.

Fuller Torrey pointed out in his cross-cultural survey, *The Mind Game – Witchdoctors and Psychiatrists* (1972) that there are many affinities between psychotherapy as it is practised in widely different cultures. By psychotherapy he means: '(1) a shared world view that makes possible the naming process; (2) certain personal qualities of the therapist that appear to promote therapy; (3) patient expectations of getting well; and (4) the techniques of therapy.' Torrey points out that there are multitudes of practitioners of psychotherapy in every culture, among whom psychiatrists and clinical psychologists, witchdoctors and spiritual healers are only some of 'the better-known species of the genus psychotherapist'.

We have repeatedly been reminded that patients are more likely to respond to treatment if they respect their therapist and accept his explanation of the cause of their distress. This can be seen in the vastly different settings in which patients consult a supernatural or a psychiatric healer yet, in both, one of the major curative agencies is suggestion. The traditional healer shares with his patient the belief in a limited number of transgressions which commonly lead to emotional disturbance and an equally restricted range of acts which must be performed to propitiate the offended deity, spirit or kinsman. Similarly the psychiatrist, although ostensibly non-judgemental and only concerned to help the patient discover by himself where he has gone wrong, is really prompting his patient to interpret his social relations in the light of his (the therapist's) explanatory theory.

In developing countries, even more than in the West, many people seek spiritual guidance in order to help them come to terms with their often harsh

life experiences. According to Hindu teaching, the penultimate stage of man's personal development is reached when his sons are able to take over the responsibilities of necessary productive work, leaving him free to devote himself to the serious business of trying to understand the meaning of existence and of his own being. He can choose between the three alternative Ways to seek enlightenment, namely the Way of *Karma* (devoting himself to *Dharmic* tasks, that is both practical and ritual good works) or that of *Jnana* (the Way of knowledge, for those who are studious and attracted to philosophical discourse) or *Bhakti* (the Way of devotional worship).

Many Hindus, in their ripe years, devote themselves to following one or other of these three Ways towards enlightenment with a seriousness comparable to that of middle-aged Americans who go jogging for some miles every day – but with this difference, that the American jogs in order to prolong his life in this incarnation, which he believes will have no earthly sequel, whereas the Hindu pursues his chosen *marg* in the hope of advancing stage by stage towards the ultimate reward, after many incarnations, of being absorbed into the true reality behind all appearances, which is to be united with God and freed from the cycle of rebirth. It may be recalled that on the night of 20 January, 1950, there was a special bhakti session in Sujarupa in honour of the devotee Maharamji who had recently taken Samadhi (or, as I had clumsily put it, had elected to be buried alive) at the precise moment when his devotions had earned him the ultimate reward. Since that occasion, bhakti has been increasingly practised in Sujarupa, with some interesting consequences.

From Plundering Mers to Law-abiding Rawats

Not many of my Rawat hosts were literate, but they had well-preserved oral traditions some of which could be verified by consulting their Raos, the recorders of their lineages; but these records go back only for a little over a hundred years. Beyond that, the Rawats recall minor warfare as part of their tribal tradition. Some of the 'battles long ago' have been recorded in the histories of surrounding Rajput States: for example, their ancestors, the Mers, fought a successful guerrilla war against the army of Jai Singh, the maharajah of Jaipur, from 1725-28. In 1754 they repulsed an army sent by the maharana of Udaipur, and in 1778 they did the same to an army sent from Jodhpur. There are records of similar routings of armies sent to subjugate them from Ajmer in 1790 and 1800, by a detachment of the Mahratha army in 1807, and by another army from Udaipur in 1816. Finally, a British-led force of well-trained Indian soldiers defeated them in a series of engagements in 1819-21, and from this time onwards their career as raiders of the villages of the plains came to an end.

The British commanders to whom was entrusted the task of keeping the peace in this section of the Aravali hills encouraged the Mers to clear fields in the jungle-filled valleys in order to grow crops, and equipped them with

pickaxes and other tools to enable them to dig wells and construct small reservoirs in which to retain water from the irregular monsoon rains. Slowly and reluctantly they relinquished their role as bandits and applied themselves instead to agriculture; this change was accelerated by a severe famine in 1832 which highlighted the importance of digging deep wells, so that they could water their crops in the recurring years of drought.

The Rawats were an offshoot of the Mers and they, in turn, of the Minas, tribes which claimed to have the blood of Prithviraj Chauhan's descendants in their veins. They invoked a legend dating from the late twelfth century, when Prithviraj's son and heir, Jodh Lakhun, married a girl of the Mina tribe, believing her to be a Rajputni. She and her two sons were later driven out from Ajmer, taking refuge among cowherds of Merwara, and from her offspring grew lineages of the Mers and Minas and, later, of the Rawats – all of whom now claim to be Chauhans.

Following 1821, when the excitements of brigandage and the prestige of being bloodthirsty warriors were denied to them, the Rawats became cultivators. When Colonel Tod first explored their territory in the early 1800s, he saw them only as ferocious bandits. Later, after their defeat in battle, he recognized their merits as soldiers if they were well trained and well led, and so created the 'Merwara Local Battalion' based in Todgarh; but the majority took to farming as their main occupation. A consequence of the pacification of the Mers and Rawats was that they slowly lost their centuries-old reputation as dreaded bandits. They also became aware that 'tribals' were regarded with disdain by caste Hindus, because they violated many of the ritual observances of Hindu society: worst of all, they were known to be eaters of beef and buffalo meat – practices which Hindus viewed with particular abhorrence.

As former warriors, the Rawats did not take kindly to being placed among the lowest of the low in Hindu society, so they set about the long slow process of Sanskritizing their customs and behaviour to make them accord with their claim to be high-caste Rajputs. This social climb has been underway for at least 150 years in the course of which they themselves have come increasingly to believe that they are indeed Chauhan Rajputs – and have derived considerable gratification from this belief – but the wider Hindu community nevertheless rejects their ambitious claim. The Hindus see them now as former tribals who have abjured many of their repugnant customs and can be accepted as Hindus – but low in caste status.

Like all Hindus, the Rawats are expected to worship the divine spirit principally through one of three Ways, namely that of Karma, Jnana or Bhakti. In a sense, they all follow the Way of Karma because there is a sacramental element in the year-long cycle of tasks of every cultivator; their working year is punctuated with small offerings to the rain-god, to the growing crops and to the eventual harvest, but most of them do this as a matter of routine rather than as acts of worship. My friend Mol Singh

explained to me that he seldom prayed to God because for him to plough a field, to sow, and tend and harvest his crops – all these were in his eyes acts of worship. He was the only conscious follower of karma-marg. Only one among my informants aspired to follow jnana, the Way of knowledge: this was Nathu/Dalla, whose hopes of having a following of respectful disciples were never realized. In his old age he lived alone, on his kinsmen's charity, and was a regular though non-participating attender at sessions of bhakti. This third Way, that of bhakti-marg, had been a minority activity in 1950, but by 1981 it had enlisted the fervent participation of practically all the members of the village at sessions of hymn-singing which went on far into the night at least once a week. Sometimes the sessions coincided with holy days in the Hindu calendar, and were announced in advance, and then numerous bhakti devotees belonging to a variety of castes would come from neighbouring villages in order to take part.

There was a striking difference between the acceptance of Sujarupa as being worthy of respect because of the fervour of its practice of bhakti, and the studious disregard of their claim to be of Rajput caste and lineage. It became clear to me that the fiction of being Chauhan Rajputs was one which the Rawats maintained among themselves. In doing so, they identified themselves nostalgically with heroic Rajput warriors of some eight or nine centuries ago – but also with the 'plundering mountain Mers' of more recent memory. At the same time, they found in the practice of bhakti a quite different form of personal and social gratification.

Bhakti has had a long and fluctuating history in India. It was first recorded as a mode of worshipping the archetypal gods, Lord Shiva and the Goddess Shakti, the sources of creation, even in the pre-Vedic era: for centuries BC, Vishnu and Surya (the Sun-God) were similarly worshipped, as was Ganesha for several centuries. Some scholars, however, date the origin of true Bhakti from the composition of the sacred verses comprising the Bhagavadgita, in the third or fourth century BC. Here, for the first time, God was revealed as a loving, personal being who claimed – and reciprocated – man's love and devotion. This aspect of the Hindu religion has been lost, rediscovered and re-emphasized in many successive eras (R. C. Zaehner, 1962). Modern Bhakti became widespread only after the late ninth century, inspired by religious teachers such as Ramanuja (who died in 1137), Ramananda and Tulsi Das in the fifteenth century. The latter both translated the epic Ramayana into Hindi and composed bhajans in the vernacular and thus made them available to the oral traditions of illiterate villagers.

By this time, the gods most often worshipped in bhakti were Vishnu and his incarnation Krishna, though often Krishna and his wife Radha, or Rama and his wife Sita were the subject of devotional hymns. Whichever God was personally addressed came to represent, for his or her worshippers, the ideal divine principle ruling over all the universe; whether he or she was addressed as a particular divine avatar or as the all-pervasive God-quality of Ishwar or

Bhagwan, Mataji or Shakti was unimportant. At heart, Hindu worship is both polytheist and monotheist at the same time. As Zaehner (1962) has pointed out, of the two divine avatars of Vishnu, Tulsidas's preference is for Rama, 'an altogether more conventional and respectable figure than is the wayward and unpredictable Krishna'. His preference was shared by the mystic Bhagats of Sujarupa.

Two famous composers of bhajans are still especially well remembered – and their hymns often sung – in Sujarupa's sessions of bhakti. These are Mirabai (*c.* 1504) a Rajput princess who renounced her privileged status in order to devote herself to the worship of Krishna and Radha, and Kabir, a low-caste weaver of Benares (fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries) who was born in a Muslim family but became a disciple of the Hindu teacher Ramananda. Kabir's hymns both denounce all caste divisions and proclaim that all men are children of one god, so Muslims and Hindus should unite in his worship. (Some decades after Kabir's death, Akbar the Great was impressed by Kabir's teaching when he tried unsuccessfully to create a universal religion; even to this day, Kabir's emphasis on the brotherhood of man causes his hymns to be especially popular among devotees of low-caste status.)

The bhakti movement was particularly strong in north India during the centuries of severe repression of Hindu worship by a succession of Muslim invaders, which began in the eleventh century. Bhakti reached a peak in the fifteenth, and declined only in the eighteenth century, to revive again in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the influence of the Hindu reformers Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda, and, above all, Sri Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekenanda. When the Hindus' religious values (on which were based their personal sense of identity) were severely threatened, they turned again and again to bhakti-marg as a source of moral support.

Although I did not appreciate this in 1950, I later came to realize that the Rawats were then living through a period of crisis. This was a time of rapidly increasing communication and contacts with the world of India, beyond their local boundaries, during which they came to realize that in that wider world they were accorded an extremely humble, if not humiliating, status as tribals whose claims to be Rajputs were rudely denied.

This confrontation with a painful reality is a phenomenon which has occurred in many communities in the years following the end of the Second World War. Both in newly independent countries and in countries with long traditions of freedom, large groups of citizens have awakened to the realization that they are deprived and underprivileged. The Brazilian social reformer, Paolo Freire, has coined the ugly term 'conscientization' to describe this process of becoming aware of being the victims of social discrimination. This has happened in several newly independent countries in Africa in which tribal rivalries and inequalities have led to violent clashes; but similar awakenings have also led to upheavals in normally stable societies.

A very understandable consequence of conscientization is for the afflicted group to become angry and to vent their anger in rioting or other acts of violence. This happened in several major cities in the USA, during the 1960s. Rioting, accompanied by looting and arson, was the response of black Americans to the realization that they were second-class citizens in an opulent society.

These riots have ceased, but in their place there has developed a covert guerrilla warfare between impoverished blacks and middle-class whites. In many of the USA's major cities large sections have become no-go areas for whites by day as well as by night. Robbery with violence has been experienced by a sizeable proportion of adult whites, of both sexes. It has reluctantly come to be accepted as a fact of life in these cities.

In the summer of 1981 it was Britain's turn, when seven industrial cities were the scene of sudden outbursts of rioting. This was not only a racial issue; instead it was an outpouring of rage on the part of youths (white as well as coloured) against a society which had nothing to offer them except unemployment benefits.

India, too, has had its share of violence in recent years as unemployed landless labourers have become resentful of their meagre existence. Egged on by an association of terrorists called Naxalites, many of whom were young radicals from middle-class families, some landless villagers murdered wealthy landowners in the hope of terrorizing their successors into conforming with the nation's plan to limit the size of individual landholdings. The Naxalite movement was suppressed, but now it is the landholders who are defying the law, using bands of thugs to beat – and often to kill – landless peasants who have tried to take possession of the landlord's excess fields. Both of these outbreaks of killing have been the product of anger and fear, anger because their interests seem to have been ignored and fear for their own survival, on either side.

The poor in India's cities endure a wretched standard of living, particularly the unskilled labourers, the cycle-rickshaw drivers and the factory workers. Every now and again they feel compelled to create a 'stir' in order to draw attention to their lot. When feelings run high, they often shatter the windscreens of cars, as if they regarded every car-owner as one of the enemy. This is so frequent an occurrence that a prudent driver takes out additional insurance against 'R and S' (Riot and Strike).

Sujarupa has been in a privileged position because its fields, like those of the other villages in Merwara, have been won from the jungle in the recent past. There are no feudal landlords laying claim to a large portion of their crops: instead, there are the more realistic claims of the government's revenue collectors, about which everyone complains – and then submits.

This is not to say that life is easy, or that standards of living are high in the village. The reverse is the case. Throughout the thirty-one years that I have known them, the farmers have had plenty to complain about – and they have

not hesitated to complain. Nevertheless, thanks to the new strains of wheat, their standard of living has marginally improved. In addition, travel by day or night is now reasonably safe: in 1950, there was much talk of armed robberies, and the heavy wooden doors of the *paul* were barred every night against intruders.

Sujarupa has become a more peaceful place and a more hospitable place than it was thirty years ago. Every day passers-by pause to join the group of gossipers who assemble round the porch of the Shiva shrine, beside the road, and frequently visitors will be attracted by the sound of bhajan-singing, and will join the group until far into the night. I have come to realize that the old men whom I met on my first visit represented the end of an era. They genuinely liked to dwell upon the Rawats' warrior ancestors, and their feats of banditry, and they thought that to give up alcohol and meat was too great a price to pay for recognition as caste Hindus. Today, this has changed: they are all bhaktis now and this ardent, joyful worship is not only rewarding in itself, but has increased both their own self-respect and their standing in the surrounding local Hindu community. For a century and a half, ever since their subjugation by the Todgarh-based army, the Rawats have been looking for a new self-image. What they have found has been well described by the Hindu scholar Gitendra Nath Banerjea (1953) who wrote: 'The concept of the adorable Lord of the World, who resides in the hearts of all beings, plays a most important part in the spiritual life of the Hindu. The feeling of deep loving adoration which he has for God in his heart is called Bhakti.'

The Rawats of Sujarupa are still rough diamonds, still prone to punctuate their conversation with obscenities and lewd jokes; but after having lost their old warlike identity for so many years, and having failed to achieve recognition as Chauhans, they have now adapted happily to a social role which is even older than the Vedas, which has helped Indians to survive centuries of oppression under alien rule and now is helping them to achieve status and respect among their fellow Hindus. Their personal accomplishment is surely greater than that of so many underprivileged groups who seem able to express their feelings only in violence, anger and destruction. One is tempted to salute them with the greeting so often heard at a gathering for bhakti: 'Sat Guru Maharaj ki jai', and wish continuing victory to that truest of Gurus, who resides in the hearts of all mankind.

Epilogue

I set out to write this book not as a scholarly monograph in the best traditions of social anthropology, but simply as a portrait of Sujarupa and some of its citizens; this has continued to be my aim but it was complicated by inescapable reminders that Sujarupa's hardships – and occasional rewards – are shared by literally millions of other Indian villagers. When I describe a fundamental change in communications brought about by the expansion of country bus services and by the arrival of transistor radios, I am noting changes which have had their effect on village life all over India. Without even waiting to become literate, my Rawat hosts are now much better informed about their own country and even (to a lesser extent) about the rest of the world than was the case in 1950. This change is no doubt more conspicuous in a community whose rate of literacy is lower than the national average.

Until recent years news about major events in India and abroad reached Sujarupa – if at all – at the leisurely pace of carriers of gossip. Villagers like to hear and see things for themselves or, failing this, to hear eye-witness accounts of dramatic happenings. Radio has given them a sense of participation in events taking place far away. When television reaches the villages (probably at first in the form of large-screen, communally owned sets) they cannot fail to be moved by the heightened feeling of participation which television conveys, especially in its live telecasts of celebrated people and events of wide public interest.

Marshall MacLuhan was the first to point out that these media appeal directly to the ears and eyes of their audience regardless of whether they are literate or non-literate. As he put it, this is causing all mankind to become a 'global village'.

In former times, villagers remained largely uninterested in peoples and events beyond their limited horizons, but this is no longer the case. A major legacy of the Green Revolution has been the villagers' abandonment of one of their oldest attributes – their reluctance to change their age-old ways. Instead, they show an eagerness to be informed quickly about any other promising new developments in agriculture. As we have seen, however, the Rawats have shown a positive reluctance to make good use of a readily

accessible health clinic, although the death rate of their children is high above the national average; and they are slow to allow their offspring (especially the girls) to attend nearby schools.

It has hitherto been the social anthropologists' concern to observe, record and analyse the concepts and behaviour of the communities which they are studying, and not to try to change their ways; but the existence of relatively new and powerful medicines, without whose aid many people will die from acute infectious illnesses, has given rise to a moral dilemma. Should a social scientist interfere?

My own practice when I see a child in high fever with a chest infection is not to question the parents' turning to a Bhopa or to a man who knows powerful charms, but instead to urge them to accept at once a series of injections of a wide-range antibiotic. If the child is suffering from prolonged diarrhoea and can be seen to be dehydrated, the most helpful thing I can do is to make up a solution of rehydration fluid, with freshly boiled water, and then feed it to the baby with a teaspoon. There is enough sugar in the rehydration powder (in addition to salt and some potassium) to make the baby eager to swallow this mild but life-saving mixture. One has to do this repeatedly, showing the mother how she can prepare and feed this fluid to her infant, and showing by example how frequently it should be given.

The wider question remains: how can the very conservative elders (especially the grandmothers) be helped to overcome their lack of trust in our kind of medicine? This will only come about when the whole of the medical team, including the part-time village health workers and the assistant nurse/midwives as well as the doctors, nurses and other medical assistants are seen to be really working together. Only when the doctors and other medical workers show respect for each other's contribution will our village patients begin to have confidence in us and in our form of healing.

We should remember how difficult it must be for an uneducated villager to share the doctor's conviction that his patient's fever is caused by a germ too small to be seen by the naked eye. In the environment of the large city hospital the doctor is the boss: what he says goes. He is acting with the conviction that he has made the correct scientific diagnosis and has prescribed the appropriate treatment. Unfortunately, he sometimes fails to pay sufficient attention to his patient's anxious relative, who remains feeling anxious, bewildered and out of place. Such a relative will be tempted to take his sick child away from hospital before his treatment is complete.

In the village setting, just as in the hospital, the doctor must remember that the patient's family should be informed about the nature of the illness and shown how they can contribute to his recovery. These are aspects of teaching which some scientifically brilliant teachers forget, while others, including some leading professors of medicine and of surgery, always remember to include the anxious relative in their treatment of the sick patient.

Good medical practice is based on scientific knowledge of human physiol-

ogy and pathology, but it is at the same time a humane and caring profession; and this can be exemplified by anyone (or hopefully everyone) in the medical team. In the decades to come, scientific advances will surely be developed to make it easier for medical staff at the Primary Health Centre and even in the village to use simple laboratory techniques to confirm the diagnosis. This will help to improve the scientific accuracy of the treatment team, but only their own conduct towards the patients and their relatives will persuade them to trust Western (or rather, cosmopolitan) medicine.

Living among largely non-literate villagers, as I have done for close on two years of my life, has taught me to respect their oral traditions and the values which these traditions exemplify. Not least, I have admired their fortitude in adversity and their rallying to the support of kinsfolk in times of bereavement. I also came to recognize some individuals among my village friends who had attained a genuine dignity of character. In my first stay in Sujarupa these included the venerable Hama Singh and the middle-aged Mol Singh. Three decades later they were succeeded by Devi Singh, Hira Singh and Samp Singh. It seems likely that in his turn Laxman Singh will become one of those respected for their good sense and personal integrity.

It is interesting to note that this list does not include any of the few individuals who have at various times asserted their claim to be the leaders of the Sujarupa panchayat – only to discover that their kinsmen had no intention of being led. In contrast, I shall always remember the 'men of character' with high regard because they have shown the quality of their personalities not by self-assertion but simply by conduct which commands their fellow-villagers' respect.

In conclusion, I should like to add that one element of life in Sujarupa which has received too little attention is the villagers' sense of humour. At the simplest level, they think it is hilariously funny if a self-important person slips and falls in the shit. They like to tease: I recall Pitha Singh's reaction to my having arrived on camel-back, when he remarked, deadpan: 'That's as good a way as any to become a eunuch.' The Rawats managed to make pauses in their day's work in order to squat and exchange stories with passing friends. The evening gossip group beside the Shiva temple was usually punctuated by volleys of laughter.

My recollections of Sujarupa include the beauty of sunsets and sunrises (both of which one sees more often in village than in city life), the sounds of yokes of oxen working in the fields or drawing water from the wells, the call of birds, especially partridges, wild peacocks and the shrill cry of kites, and at night the distant – or sometimes not so distant – howling of packs of jackals. In 1950, one had the sense, each night, of a gathering together of each of the twenty-five households which clustered inside the perimeter of a thorn fence which could be entered only through the gate of the *paul*. There was a murmuring of talk in each family group, and occasionally voices were raised in anger.

During succeeding years, sessions of bhajan-singing have enlivened these evenings with increasing frequency. Sometimes they were relatively short-lived, but when they took off they would continue for hours, accompanied by cries of 'Jai Guru Maharaj' and 'Aj ke anand ki jai', exclamations of worship of God and of gratitude for the spiritual bliss which has visited them this night.

There are moments like this, during sessions of fervent hymn-singing and in relaxed, leisurely conversations, which make one feel that in spite of their hard work and near-penury the Rawats of Sujarupa have made good use of their lives in this incarnation. At such moments they too believe that their life has been worth living. In this respect they are more fortunate than many other communities in India – and in the world.

APPENDIX I

Some Relevant Village Studies

A classic example of the observation of a village over several decades is the work of William and Charlotte Wiser, who published *Behind Mud Walls,* a description of life in Karimpur, a village in the Punjab in north India, in 1931. Subsequent editions of their book included reports on changes in the village observed in 1960 and in 1970. Karimpur was a large village, including members of twenty-one castes, among them a small, impecunious group of converts to Christianity.

The Wisers noted certain continuities, including the sustained permeation of village life by religion and its observances; the persistence of caste hierarchies; the priority of family obligations over personal claims. Another aspect of the village which had remained unchanged was its neglect of environmental hygiene; houses and house-yards were swept daily, but the sweepings of refuse and excrement were left exposed in the village lanes and flies abounded everywhere. Infectious diseases were still extremely common.

The Wisers also noted some important changes: by 1960 the number of bicycles in the village had increased from two to fifty-six. The daily frequency of buses had greatly increased and villagers used them both to go shopping in the bazaars of the nearest town and to convey sick relatives to doctors (both allopathic and traditional) who practised in the town – but these doctors were usually too overburdened with patients to spare the time to examine them properly.

The most striking changes were associated with the improved and more varied crops cultivated by the villagers. Thanks to new seed grains, increased irrigation and the use of chemical fertilizers from 1967 onwards the harvests were much more plentiful but even before this the increased income from their fields had enabled many villagers to invest in power-driven tubewells and factory-made metal ploughs, fodder-cutters and seedpressers. As in Sujarupa, the farmers had begun to cultivate vegetables such as spinach, mustard, gourds, cucumber, okra, garlic and peanuts – which had formerly only been grown by the low-caste community of gardeners, here called Kachchi.

By 1960, school attendance included one-third of the eligible children, but

girls were underrepresented. An important change had been the replacement of traditional oil-wick lamps by kerosene lanterns, of which there were now some 550 in Karimpur so that people could read by lamplight – if they knew how to read.

Government agents had helped in the transition to the new seed grains. They had also taught better methods of animal husbandry, and the village cattle were now fatter and healthier than before.

In 1960 and again in 1970 complaints were heard about the corruption of petty government officers – but the villagers accepted this as ineradicable, and did not expect it to change. They held similar views about the police, whose brutality and extortion were such that the villagers preferred to deal with crimes on their own initiative, concealing them from the police, if possible.

The Wisers observed that several low-caste communities were moving up the social scale: the Chamars (leatherworkers) called themselves Jatav in 1960, and Yadav (a more ambitious title) in 1970. The carpenter caste claimed to be a sub-caste of Brahmins, called Ojhas – although the existing Brahmins denied this claim. Other low-level castes, including the Kumbars (potters) and the Telis (oil-pressers) were also aspiring towards a change of name and status.

Karimpur had, by 1970, some twenty years' experience of the formal, elected panchayat; but its leading members were, significantly, the sons of Brahmins and landowners, who were still effectively dominating the village scene. In this respect Karimpur is typical of Indian villages. A majority of India's nearly 600,000 villages have populations of between 500 and 1000 persons, among whom are members of several different castes. Intercommunal co-operation does not come easily; social scientists have repeatedly drawn attention to the prevalence of factionalism in Indian village life. In large villages, factions readily come into being and as readily change their composition. Sustained alliances between caste groups based on mutual trust are the exception. It seems that distrust of the others' motives is a common response when people from different castes are supposedly working together. This was certainly the case in the large village of Fatehpura (including members of thirty-eight castes) in which I lived throughout 1951. During the course of the year I saw several alliances formed between caste groups, only to become undermined by distrust and fall apart before the year was out.

In 1977, in his Gandhi Memorial Lecture in Bangalore, the anthropologist M. N. Srinivas described factionalism in starker terms, saying: 'Indian villages have ceased to be communities and have become instead battlegrounds for the rich and poor to fight each other.' There certainly have been violent clashes between landless villagers and the minions of rich landowners, in several regions, right up to 1981; but developments have also taken place without resorting to violence. For example, McKim Marriott returned in

1969 to the north Indian village Kishan Garhi, which he had studied in 1951-52, and found it radically changed (Marriott, 1973).

Kishan Garhi had also profited richly by the Green Revolution, thanks to the intelligence and hard work of a number of able farmers. Where they formerly occupied modest mud huts, they now had spacious brick buildings, lit by electricity; they had tractors, tubewells, threshing machines, winnowers, flourmills and fodder-cutters. The newly prosperous farmers included Brahmins, former moneylenders and one or two former leatherworkers (who were counted as untouchables only thirty years earlier). Several very able young men had returned to Kishan Garhi in the knowledge that their skill and diligence would now earn them at least as good a living as they could make in urban employment. Perhaps because they are all nearly equally well off, there has been a reduction of concern about caste status. Having seen the early stages of the agricultural revolution, these men and their sons are alert to the possibility of future changes.

In his paper Marriott makes it clear that in Kishan Garhi old religious prejudices were not allowed to stand in the way of the successful exploitation of new agricultural technology – even by Chamars.

The 1970s have been a remarkable period in Indian history. During the preceding decade Dr Norman Borlaug, the plant geneticist, had developed valuable new strains of rice and corn and then became engaged in the task of persuading authorities in India, Pakistan and other developing countries to use these strains in field trials. The trials took place in India and Pakistan in 1965 (a year in which, for a short period, the two countries were at war) and on a larger scale in the winter planting of 1966. After the rich harvests of 1967, these countries needed no further persuasion: the Green Revolution was underway. It continued during the seventies, freeing India from its recent dependence on shipments of grain from the USA in order to avert famines. The year 1978 was also notable because it recorded, for the first time since the Second World War, a decline in the rate of increase of populations in the developing countries, particularly in Asia. For years, the world's population had been increasing more rapidly than the increase in production of staple food grains; if this imbalance had continued, large-scale famines would have been inevitable. Even now the population increase is excessive; but at least the inhabitants of many sectors of the most populous areas in the world could be sure of being given their daily bread – and this has often been the precursor of a decline in population growth.

It is often assumed that the rapid introduction of any new technology into a traditional village will be to its detriment, but this is not always the case. The Green Revolution is an outstanding example of successful culture contact, in which villages in developing countries all over the world were able to profit from scientific discoveries made by an American agricultural scientist.

It has, however, been pointed out that the Green Revolution has been most beneficial to the rich farmers, with wide fields and financial resources – in

fact, that it makes rich farmers richer and does not help the poor to the same degree. This is only partly true, as the recent experience of Sujarupa's increased crops has shown, even though their water supply is limited.

Richard Critchfield *Villages* (1981) in his book has given an account of the village Ghungrali, in the Punjab, which he visited in 1970 and 1980. Ghungrali has both benefited by the Green Revolution and experienced some unexpected threats to its social integration. This village is dominated by Jats, who are landowners, farmers and warriors. The two other large castes in their village are the Chamars (low-caste leatherworkers) and the Mazhbis (equally low-caste barn-cleaners) who have traditionally been employed as farm labourers by the Jats. The village included Jats of long standing, and others who had fled from Pakistan during the troubles of 1947. The latter were given grants of land by the government and worked hard to make good the heavy losses they had suffered.

One of their number, called Basant Singh, was an enterprising innovator. In 1953 he was the first to obtain a government loan to sink a tubewell (by 1981, there were 106 such wells in Ghungrali, all run by electricity). He was the first to try new seeds, and in 1960 the first to use chemical fertilizer. In 1962 he was the first to buy a tractor, and in 1970 the first to buy a combine harvester. By the autumn-sowing of 1967 the new dwarf wheat was sown in all the 1400 acres of wheatland in Ghungrali. In 1977, rice was cultivated for the first time, as a cash crop. In the following year, a rotation of three crops (wheat, pulse and rice) was instituted for the first time. The Jats now started to prosper and in doing so began to regret the traditional *jajmani* system under which the landless lower-castes worked for them and were rewarded by receiving one-twentieth of the harvest of wheat, together with the right to graze their cattle on parts of the Jats' land. Just before the spring harvest of 1970, the Jats told their low-caste workers that in future they would receive only one part in thirty of the new, richer wheat harvest. This led to a boycott on the part of the Chamars and Mazhbis, who preferred to find work elsewhere, earning a daily wage. Quite abruptly, a centuries-old relationship between these caste communities was broken, and it has not been restored.

Today, the Jats are richer than ever before. Their standards of living have risen – for example, they now list a TV set as part of a girl's dowry. At busy times in the farming year they employ temporary labourers who travel from poor districts of neighbouring states in search of such employment. But prosperity has brought difficulties: the low-caste communities resent the Jats' prosperity and self-interest, and inter-caste strife is a growing possibility. Within the Jat community itself, addiction to alcohol and to opium has increased. The rift between the communities continues to widen even though all three groups worship together in the same Gurdwara (Sikh temple). Sikhism, to which they all subscribe, declares the equality of all mankind, and the abolition of caste differences: but these differences stubbornly persist. This is an example of the Green Revolution's benefiting especially the

landowners and rich farmers, and thereby widening the gap between their wealth and the extreme poverty of landless members of the low-caste communities. This inequality has been tolerated for centuries, because it has been attributed to one's *karma*, the accumulation of merit or demerit in past lives; but modern democratic politics are causing the underprivileged groups in India to become aware of social inequities – and to resent them.

In a different cultural context, the anthropologist Dr Margaret Mead gave us – years before the new seed grains were in existence – an account of culture-contact in a small, primitive community in Melanesia which demonstrated that to borrow copiously from a quite different culture does not necessarily result in the decline of the borrowing society, but can lead to its rapid advance.

In 1928, she lived for six months in the village of Peri, situated on an island in the territory of New Guinea, studying a group of the Manus tribe. At that time, as Dr Mead put it, they were 'a mere two thousand nearly naked savages, living in pile dwellings in the sea, their earlobes weighed down with shells, their hands still ready to use spears, their anger implemented with magical curses, their morality dependent upon the ghosts of the recently dead – a people without history, without any theory about how they came to be, without any belief in a permanent future life, without any knowledge of geography, without writing, without political forms sufficient to unite more than two or three hundred people'. (Mead, 1956)

Twenty-five years later, her interest aroused by reports that the Manus people had undergone a spectacular change in the space of only a few years, Dr Mead went back to re-study the inhabitants of New Peri, which had taken the place of the old village. In 1953, she found them 'potential members of the modern world, with ideas of boundaries in time and space, responsibility to God, enthusiasm for law, and committed to trying to build a democratic community, educate their children, police and landscape their village, care for the old and the sick and erase age-old hostilities between neighbouring tribes'. One might well wonder what had happened to bring about this transformation.

In brief, the villagers of Peri had experienced an overwhelming culture-contact during the Second World War, when a major military staging post was established on the island of Manus. For a short span of years they found themselves confronted with the whole panoply of American ships, airplanes, weapons, tinned food and all the impedimenta of an army in the field – and also with the American soldiers, black and white, whose openness, cheerfulness and evident command of the products of technology they found astonishing and impressive.

Many other hitherto isolated communities in the East Indies experienced similar sudden cultural confrontations. In several of them, eloquent but emotionally unstable prophets appeared, preaching a pattern of ideas which came to be known as Cargo Cults. The prophets, like traditional shamans,

would become possessed by a divine spirit and proclaim that a new era would shortly dawn; a cargo ship would sail into their waters, laden with jeeps, motorboats, radios, tins of food – in fact all the riches of the American army – and these would be a divine gift to the local people. In anticipation, the prophets advised them to destroy their gods, and the seeds which they had kept for the next sowing. Inevitably, these utopian dreams were doomed to disappointment. As time went by and no cargo ship appeared, the followers of these cults found themselves cheated and hungry, and in many cases they turned against the prophet.

In Manus, however, another persuasive orator, called Paliau, preached to his kinsmen in a quite different vein. He had served for four years as a junior police constable and had realized that Western goods and institutions were created not by magic, but by the application of learned skills and hard work. He persuaded his fellow-tribesmen to adopt the New Way, which meant a crash course of learning, and then emulating, the American way of life.

Until Dr Mead published her account of the transformation of Manus society it had been widely believed that sudden confrontation with a technologically and socially advanced society could only be harmful to a people still living at a preliterate, tribal level – and that the tribal group would suffer even more if it precipitately abandoned its traditional beliefs, its values, its age-old customs and its mode of subsistence. There had been several demonstrations of the overwhelming of small communities, who had for centuries lived in harmony with their physical and cultural environment but now had become impoverished hangers-on, at the fringe of the high-technology society.

The experience of the Manus showed that massive culture-contact could also have a quite different outcome if the recipient society decided not to borrow or imitate only a few features of the advanced society but instead decided to adopt all its important elements in one comprehensive sweep. Dr Mead's argument was that every culture embodies a total pattern of mutually interacting elements – so if the members of a different culture wish to become Americanized, they will do so both more easily and more thoroughly if they engage in a total, not just partial, adoption of American ways. This was what Paliau advised, and what the Manus did; they adopted American clothes, house style, furniture, cuisine, schooling and democratic participation in the conduct of their community.

On a second return visit to Peri, in 1964, Dr Mead found a large school, with teaching in English as well as in Manus. What was more remarkable was that this community, whose world was formerly limited to very near horizons, was now listening to broadcasts of the Olympic Games from Tokyo, as they had recently followed broadcasts of John Glenn's first space flights round the earth. In this sudden widening of physical and mental horizons parents were participating at the same time as their children. At the village level, the adults were entering with relish into the decisionmaking of their local Council.

The Manus peoples have demonstrated that sweeping all-inclusive change can be brought about in a traditional village society; but there are few other communities which have changed so rapidly, and with so high a degree of success. Conservatism, and reluctance to change their ways are among the basic attributes of villagers in general, and in many respects the villagers of Sujarupa resisted rather than accepted change.

Two American pioneers of village studies were the anthropologists Robert Redfield and Oscar Lewis, who ostensibly disagreed violently with each other's findings, although their texts revealed large areas of agreement. The former started his field work in Mexico in 1926; it was published in 1930 under the title *Tepoztlan – a Mexican Village*. In 1943, Oscar Lewis began his observations in the same village, published in 1951 as *Tepoztlan Restudied*. Their accounts differed so widely in places that they might have been describing two quite different communities.

In brief, Lewis criticized Redfield for having painted a sentimental, idyllic account of Tepoztlan, in which the painful aspects of life in that village were largely ignored or minimized. Redfield, for his part, thought that Lewis had overrated the degree to which life in the village was dominated by fear, envy and mistrust. He went on to argue that fieldworkers carry with them certain expectations, or sets of mind, of which they may not be fully aware; he called these 'hidden questions'.

In his own experience, he had come to recognize that he kept asking himself: 'What do these people enjoy?' Oscar Lewis, however, seemed to keep asking: 'What do these people suffer from?' This preoccupation led him, in later years, to postulate a worldwide 'culture of poverty' which had as its common elements hardship, suffering, misery, anger, violence and cruelty.

Redfield (1941) employed a number of paired characteristics to distinguish village from urban-groups. These included (in each case, listing the village attribute first) primitive-civilized, natural-spurious, simple-sophisticated, constrained-free, integrated-disintegrated, moral-corrupt, conformist-noncomformist, stable-changing, human-dehumanized, homogeneous-heterogeneous, personal-impersonal, sacred-secular and superstitious-rational. In many of these pairs the attribute associated with urban living had a derogatory connotation, while the one linked with village life was generally laudable. Here there was clearly a danger that Redfield's partiality in favour of the villagers might lead to bias in the use of this list of attributes.

In their subsequent writings, Redfield continued to emphasize the theme of enjoyment, and Lewis that of suffering; each looked for different things, and each found what he was looking for. Nevertheless, there were some key values of village life about which they were in agreement: these included love of the land, respect for manual toil in the fields, subordination of the self in deference to obligations to one's family, the exercise of domestic authority and suspicion of city folk.

Richard Critchfield (1981) in his turn has compiled a list of characteristics which he finds common to most villages. In doing so, he draws on generalizations made by Redfield and Lewis, and adds others derived from his own reading and his fieldwork in villages in a dozen developing countries. It can be read as present-day city-dwellers' accepted ideas about villagers; perhaps in a few decades it will need to be recast. His list includes the following items:

Individual: Villagers have a short lifespan, the women dying at a younger age than the men; they are fatalistic, but have a capacity for spontaneous enjoyment; they are conservative, respect age, tradition and established customs.

Family: The head of the family is responsible for seeing that the need of its members are met; all junior members submit to his authority and contribute to family resources; family life is crowded, gregarious, lacking in privacy; wives assume full status as family members only as the mothers of sons.

Labour: Hard physical agricultural work is respected and confers a sense of personal worth. Children are expected to work from an early age. Education is feared, because it may cause young people to lose their commitment to physical labour.

Religion: Villagers tend to be sceptical about organized religion of any creed, and unimpressed by priests. Most of them believe that wrongdoing will earn punishment in an afterlife. They believe in the supernatural, in all its forms and in supernatural means of protection against witches, sorcery, etc. In contrast, they are suspicious of modern medicine.

Social involvement: Villagers are reluctant to be drawn into political activity; they are sensitive to censure by village gossip, and vigorous in gossiping about each other.

Critchfield has included a number of characteristics (such as arranged marriages, funeral rites, hospitality towards strangers and limited interest in news about other countries than their own) which are not the prerogative of villagers alone, but are shared with urban-dwelling people in their own society.

Two other journalists have made valuable contributions to Indian village studies. One is Sarah Hobson (1978) whose book *Family Web* gives a well-observed account of the tribulations of women in a south Indian village; the other is Victor Zorza whose continuing reports of life in a Himalayan village appear in the *Guardian* and in the *Washington Post* during 1982 and 1983. They will surely eventually be published in book form.

Although I cannot do justice to the many interesting reports which have been published in the field of Indian anthropology, I would like to draw attention to one or two which have been particularly relevant to my observations in Sujarupa. The first of these is by another husband and wife team: the anthropologists, Stanley and Ruth Freed, who have worked in north India. They studied the effects of urbanization in Shanti Nagar, a village of farmers eleven miles to the north-west of the city of Delhi, for more than a year in

1958-59 and have reported their findings in a series of monographs, including one on *Sickness and Health* (1979).

In their investigation of the villagers' concepts of sickness and healing, the Freeds noted the co-existence of quite diverse ideas concerning the cause of illness, including spirits, the anger of the Mother Goddess, imbalance of bodily humours (either the three humours of Ayurvedic teaching, or the four of Unani medicine) or germ theory (known only to a few). Contagious illnesses were attributed to the invasion of the body by intrusive forces which must be driven out. The evil eye and the envy of ghosts whose death had been premature were commonly invoked as being the agents of disease, and steps were taken to counteract their influence. Curiously, however, the informants in Shanti Nagar did not make any mention of witchcraft in relation to disease or death in childhood.

Nor is witchcraft mentioned among the list of causes of disease elicited by Oscar Lewis (1955) in his fact-filled account of another village situated not far from Delhi. On the other hand M. E. Opler (1958) reported that witchcraft was prevalent, and feared, in villages in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh. From south India, also, there is a report by Scarlett Epstein (1967) that in the village of Wangala in Mysore State women – though not men – were frequently accused of practising witchcraft. Here, however, the supposed witch was believed to be acting under the influence of an alien spirit, so she was not personally blamed for her behaviour even though she might have to be beaten in order to free her from this harmful invasion of her being; hence accusations of witchcraft could be openly made, and acted upon. In north India, on the other hand, the witch is perceived as being both dangerous and quick to take revenge if she is accused of practising black magic. Hence witchcraft may have been too sensitive a subject to be volunteered to the Freeds or to Oscar Lewis by their village informants when they were interviewed by interpreters who were comparative strangers. It was my own experience in Sujarupa that my informants avoided discussing witches, except in general terms, until near the end of my stay and even then most of them were scrupulous not to utter the supposed witch's name; but I was left in no doubt that every village in this area harboured at least one witch, of whom they were very much afraid. This was also true of Fatehpura and still more so of the Bhils of Kotra Bhomat.

During the three decades which followed the end of the Second World War in 1945 and India gaining her Independence in 1947, there was a flowering of interest in Indian studies on the part of some leading anthropologists, including David Mandelbaum, Milton Singer, Oscar Lewis and M. E. Opler, each of whom blazed a trail and subsequently encouraged able students, American and Indian, to follow in their footsteps. In spite of Britain's long association with India their leading anthropologists (with the exception of Christof von Fuhrer Haimendorf) had done their basic fieldwork in Africa or in the Far East. This did not deter some able young

enthnographers such as Kathleen Gough, Adrian Mayer, Eric Miller and Colin Rosser from carrying out their fieldwork in India. This influx of scholars helped India's leading anthropologist, M. N. Srinivas, to attract able Indian scholars and future teachers into this hitherto neglected field.

Two publications which helped to draw attention to this new development were *India's Villages*, edited by M. N. Srinivas (1955) and *Village India* edited by McKim Marriott (also 1955). These were collections of papers on very recent fieldwork. Their authors were predominantly American, although they included contributions from four British writers and three from India (M. N. Srinavas, S. C. Dube and Jyotirmoyee Sarma). In his foreword to the former collection of essays, Srinivas stressed the importance of carrying out research on India's rural and tribal communities before they became radically changed by the advent of industrialization.

A landmark showing the progress already made in this direction was the publication in 1968 of a more substantial collection of papers, entitled *Structure and Change in Indian Society*, edited by Singer and Cohn. Even here only two of the contributors were Indians (M. N. Srinivas and A. K. Ramanujam). Two years later, David Mandelbaum produced an invaluable survey of research entitled *Society in India.* In his selective bibliography I was interested to note that, of the papers and books published since India's independence, 140 were by Indian and 135 by Western scholars.

The two collections of essays published in 1955 had clearly helped Dr Srinivas to advance teaching and research in his own country. The reader of each of these sets of reports cannot fail to be impressed by the diversity of India's villages, and also by the similarities due to the all-pervasive influence of Hindu teachings. Their papers differ from the earlier classic studies of social anthropology in that the communities described are not seen as isolated, self-contained societies in microcosm.

The anthropologists of the 1950s and sixties were keenly aware not only of continuities in the communities which they studied, but also of culture-contact and change. For example, earlier studies of caste in India tended to emphasize the unchanging character of its status hierarchy; but as we have observed in the history of the Rawats this immutability was now seen to be less rigid than had been thought. Hutton (1946), Srinivas (1952) and Silverberg (1968), among others, have described how low-caste groups have adopted patterns of behaviour from their caste superiors and, within a few generations, have been able to rise within the status hierarchy. Sometimes this happens peacefully, over an extended period, but sometimes the higher-caste groups feel threatened and forcibly resist the aspiring caste's attempt to improve their status.

A new area of research which has appealed to workers in a number of allied fields is medical anthropology which already has acquired vigorous offshoots in the area of transcultural psychiatry. The latter has its own vigorous journal *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, edited by Arthur Kleinman and now in its

sixth year of publication, while the American Anthropological Association's *Medical Anthropology Newsletter* has been in existence for thirteen years. The idea is growing in Britain and in India, no less than in the USA, that each of these disciplines, medicine and anthropology, can profitably learn from each other.

APPENDIX 2

Genealogy of Suja, Son of Rupa

The Family Tree of Suja Singh, Founder of Sujarupa

Suja Singh had six sons, named (1) Vijay, (2) Lal, (3) Khuman, (4) Um, (5) Goda, and (6) Dungar.

The descendants of these six men are shown in the following genealogical tables, which include only male descendants and young female descendants who were still living in their parental homes at the time of drawing up these tables, in March, 1981.

1. Vijay/Suja

- Nanaga
  - Mal
    - Champ
      - ♀Narori
    - Ghisa
      - Tilok
      - Rupa
      - ♀Mira
    - Ram
      - Deep
      - Parbu
      - ♀Manni
      - ♀Rekha
      - ♀Soni
    - Dau
      - ♀Santoshi
  - Hajari
    - 0
- Udai
  - 0
- Surat
  - Man
    - Seshu
    - Mangal
  - Moti
    - Hari
      - Masari
    - Ghisa
      - 0

2. Lal/Suja

- Jod
  - Himat
    - Punam
      - ♀Chenki
      - ♀Pushba
    - Mesat
      - ♀Gisli
    - Teja
      - Lumba
      - ♀Nenni
    - Prem
      - Shanti
- Inder
  - Nathu
    - 0
  - Rupa
    - Shiva

Chinam

Puran

Ram

♀Baggu
Bhagwan

Durak

Badda
♀Rekha
♀Jamini

Kishan

Laxman

♀Kamla

Mangu

Lum

Gomin

Ghisa

Narayan
Sarjan
♀Gita
♀Khushba

Gen

♀Kamala

Devi

Mithu

Madan
♀Pista
♀Premi

Taru

Pancha
(adopted by
Dungar)

Keshar

Nol

Panna

♀Ganga

Ram

Sandar
Mithu
♀Mohini

Kum

Karma

Tejat

Kalyan

Gopal

3. Khuman/Suja

Asa

Chatar — Nathu — Til

Bhan — Laxman — Gopal — Dungar — Parteb — Chain — Mohan — Laxman — Suresh

Bhera ♀Sita — Madan — Ham ♀baby — Bhim Arjan ♀Pushi

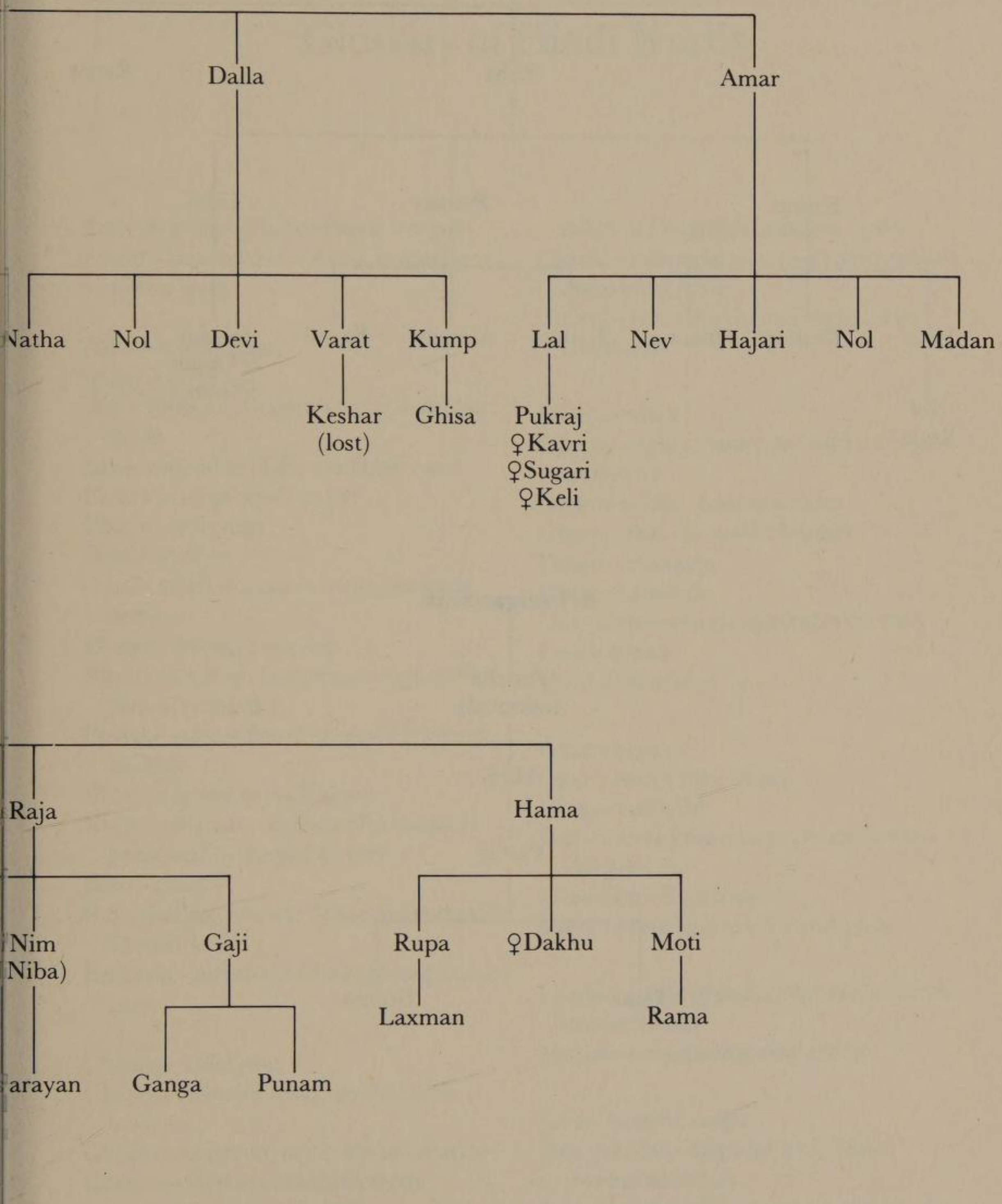
4. Um/Suja

Madhu — Lum — Gen — Mot

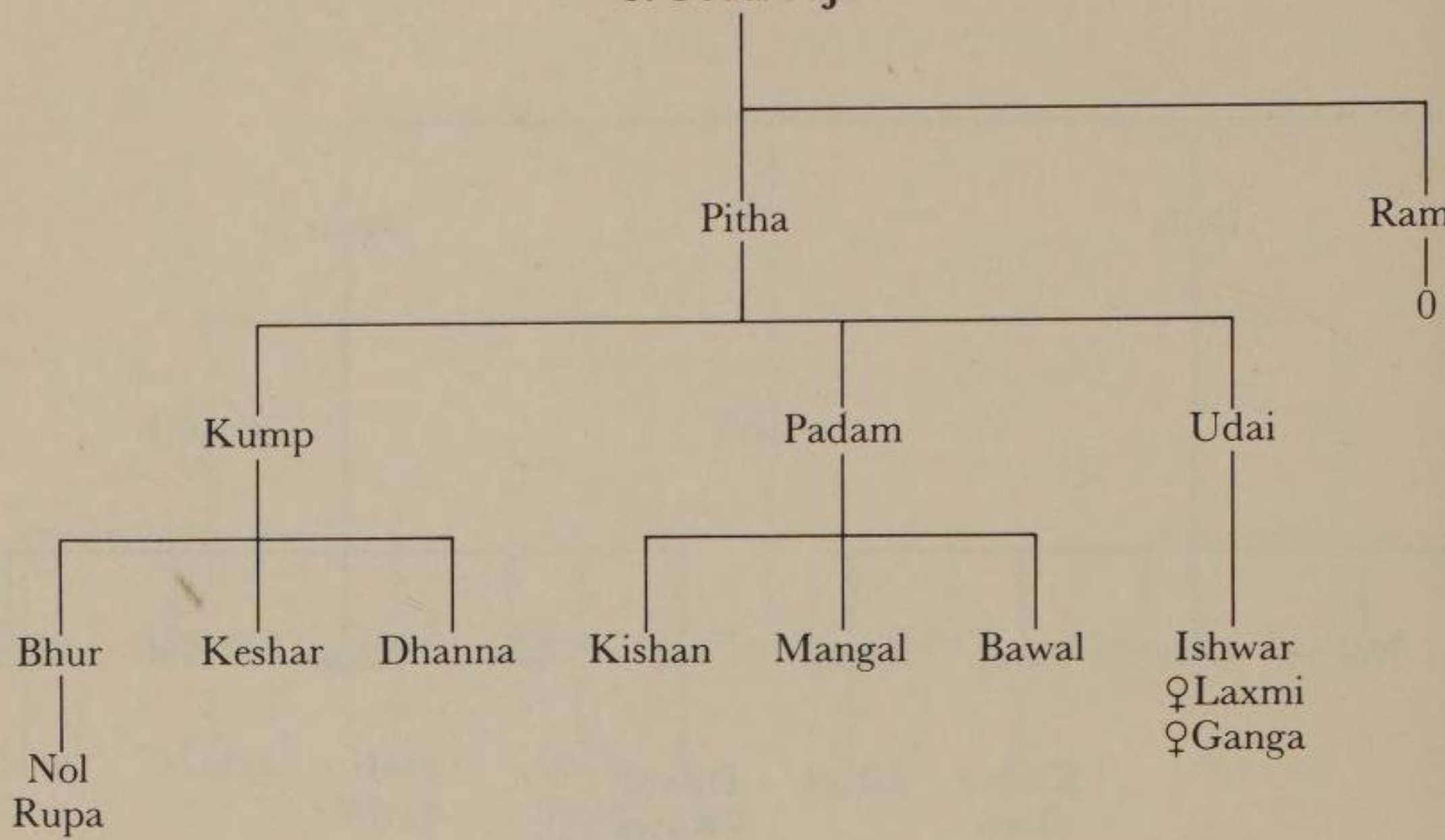
0 — Hira — Dau — Ganga ♀Vasanti — Prem ♀Radha ♀Buri

♀Sagani ♀Shanti ♀Chandra — Puran — Bheru — 0

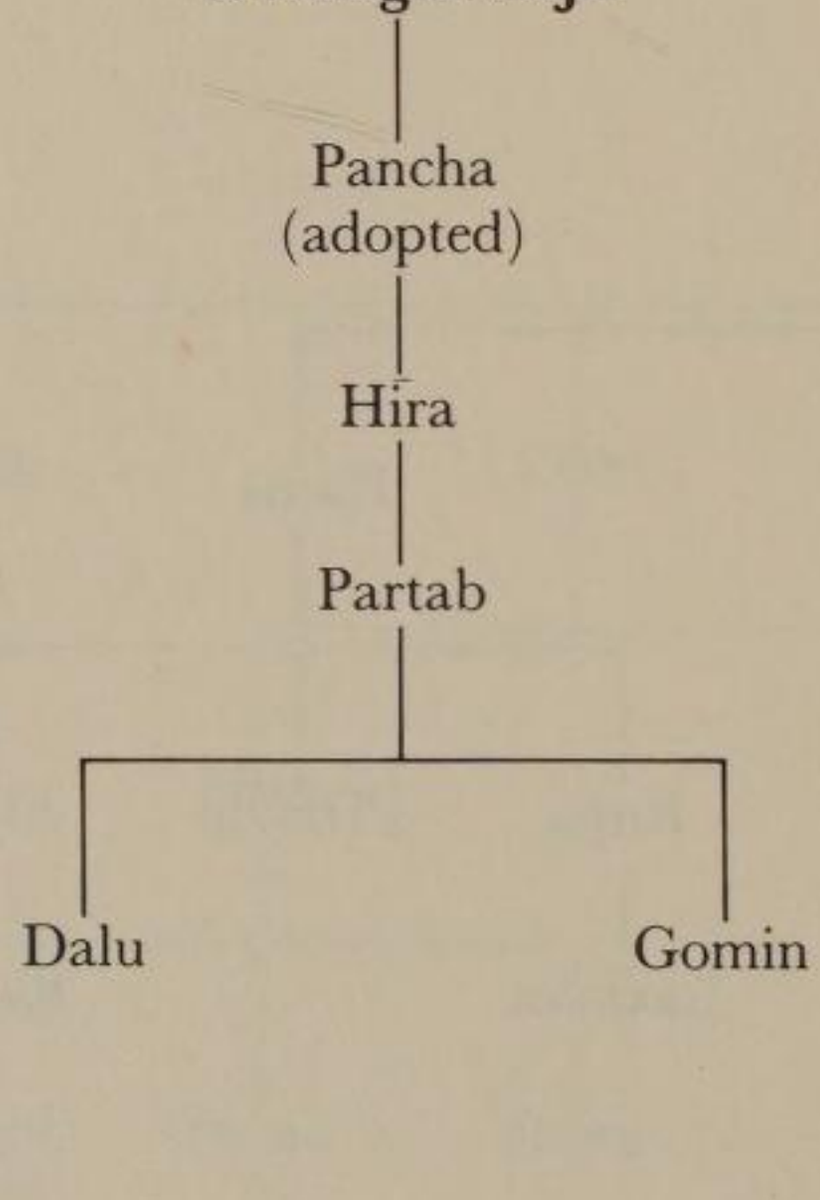
♀Lila ♀Rekha


Dalla
Amar
Natha
Nol
Devi
Varat
Kump
Lal
Nev
Hajari
Nol
Madan
Keshar
(lost)
Ghisa
Pukraj
♀Kavri
♀Sugari
♀Keli
Raja
Hama
Nim
Niba)
Gaji
Rupa
♀Dakhu
Moti
Laxman
Rama
arayan
Ganga
Punam

5. Goda/Suja



6. Dungar/Suja



APPENDIX 3

Glossary of Hindi Words

Arti – worship of flame offered to a god
Avatar – incarnation of a god, in human or animal form

Babu – learned man
Bahin – sister
-bai – suffix to a woman's name, meaning sister
Bania – member of the merchant caste
Barat – bridegroom's escort
Bhagat – holy man
Bhai – brother
-bhai – suffix to a man's name, meaning brother
Bhajan – hymn of worship
Bhakti – singing of devotional hymns; the Way of worship
Bhang – a decoction of chopped leaves of hashish
Bhat – minstrel to the Rajputs
Bhopa – shaman, or priest who becomes possessed by the god he serves
Bhut – ghost
Bidi – Indian cigarette (tobacco wrapped in a brown leaf)
Brahmin – member of the highest (priestly) caste

Channa – chickpeas
Charas – cannabis resin, smoked with tobacco
Chakkar – a circuit, or circumambulation
Chamar – leatherworker (formerly regarded as untouchable)
Chauhan – a Rajput lineage, formerly rulers of a kingdom based on Ajmer
Chauki – memorial altar to commemorate a deceased relative
Churel – ghost of a woman who died in childbirth

Dakan – witch
Dharm – right conduct, as taught in Hindu scriptures
Dharm-bahin – honorific sister
Dharm-bhai – honorific brother
Dholi – drummer
Dhoti – loincloth
Dosa – a humour circulating in the body
Dost – friend
Dosti – friendship

Ghar – house
Gher – men's stick-dance
Gujar – cowherd
Gur – coarse brown sugar, much used in villages
Gurdwara – Sikh temple
Guru – a religious teacher and guide

Harijan – child of god, a euphemism for the untouchables
Hathai – communal sitting-place

Jadu – harmful magic
Jadu-phoonk – harmful spell, blown towards its victim
Jain – member of the Jain sect, a heterodox offshoot of Hinduism

Jajmani – a system of reciprocal tasks and obligations between low-caste artisans and their higher-caste patrons
-ji – suffix added to a person's name to denote respect and regard, as in Gandhiji
Jnana – the Way of knowledge

Kamria-path – a fierce, jealous god of the Bhils
Kapha – phlegm (one of the three dosas)
Kar – magical square or circle, which a ghost cannot enter
Karma – the inheritance of good and bad things done in previous existences; one's allotted task in life, the Way of good works
Kharif – summer crop
Khol – black eyeliner
Kshatriya – member of the warrior caste
Kukri – Gurkha knife, with a curved blade
Kumbar (or Kumhar) – a potter

Lohar – blacksmith

Magra – low hills
Magrai – dialect spoken by the magra-dwellers
Majera – small brass cymbals
Mali – a gardener in a rich man's house, or a merchant gardener
Mantar – a charm
Marg – a street, or a Way, one of the varieties of approved religious conduct
Mazhbi – barn-cleaners, of low caste
Muljim – an accused person or persons

Natha – a second marriage, sometimes to a widow
Noniya – saltmakers and ditch-diggers (of Sudra rank in caste)

Ojhas – a Sudra caste, now claiming to be Brahmins
Orni – woman's cotton shawl

Pakka – ripe, trustworthy, well made
Pagalkhana – madhouse
Panchayat – village council
Parhet – ghost
Patel – village headman
Paul – room for guests
Pitta – bile (one of the three dosas)
Puja – a ritual of worship
Purdah – seclusion of women

Rabi – winter crop
Rabli – a sweet pudding served at wedding feasts
Rajput – son of a king
Rajputni – daughter of a king
Rakha – branding the skin with a hot iron or fragment of pottery (as a mode of healing)
Rakhi – coloured thread tied round a brother's wrist by his sister
Rao – keeper of a Rajput's family records
Roti – Indian bread, pancakes made of wheat, millet or maize flour

Safa – a large turban
Sagai – engagement ceremony
Samadhi – a saintly death marking release from the chain of rebirth
Sannyasi – an ascetic holy man
Satsang – religious instruction
Shaman – a priest who becomes possessed by the spirit of his god
Shastra – ancient Hindu scriptures
Sikotri – a fierce, but also protective goddess worshipped by the Bhils
Sirauni – an offering of rice at the funeral pyre (as practised by Rawats)
Sirpanch – head of a village council
Sitar – a stringed instrument
Sudra – of labouring or artisan caste (fourth in the hierarchy of castes)

Tabiz – small metal amulet worn round the neck, or the upper arm
Tabla – hand drums
Tantric – relating to a secret cult, with sexual rites
Teli – oil-presser
Thali – large brass serving dish
Thik – correct, in good order

Tilak – red mark on the forehead
Toran – a painted wooden shield hung over the portal of the bride's home on the day of her wedding

Vaid – practitioner of medicine as taught by followers of Ayurvedic scriptures
Vaisya – of merchant caste
Vayu – wind (one of the three dosas)
Vind – bridegroom
Vind Raja – Royal Bridegroom (an honorific title given to Rajput bridegrooms during the days leading up to their wedding)

Yadav – a caste title assumed by formerly untouchable Chamars (leatherworkers) who have renounced demeaning occupations and customs

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